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## Diplomová práce

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**Journey Towards otherness. Nadine Gordimer's The Pickup.**

**Cesta k jinakosti. Poutníci Nadine Gordimerové.**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a že jsem uvedla všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

*Teena Stýbalová*

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## **I. The complex world of Nadine Gordimer**

### **A. Why Nadine Gordimer?**

Because Nadine Gordimer is an intriguingly complex writer: not only because she has produced quite a respectable number of novels, short stories, and non-fiction. She is a complex writer for complexity is a word, that in my point of view, best describes the world Gordimer has portrayed in her novels. Curious contradictions, moral dilemmas of various forms and shapes, human existence caught up in ambivalent situations that is what hunts all her characters be they women, men, black or white. All is tinted by a sense of contrariety: the imagined space they inhabit, the private realm of family, its bonds, affections or conflicts, the sphere of erotic love or the arena of politics. Life as conveyed by Nadine Gordimer is a world of no easy solutions, her novels simply complicate matters. In return, they make it more difficult for readers as well. They encourage complexity of what one is feeling and thinking and provoke one to look at the real world with extended awareness.

### **B. Gordimer and otherness**

Difficulties arising out of complicated life situations are very often related to the complex nature of human relationships, especially communication with those, given the fierce reality of Apartheid, that belong to the other side of the barricade and belong to other groups, other cultures, other "races". How to establish connections to individuals distant from one due to given difference has not only been a subject matter explored in Gordimer's writing, it has been the issue throughout her own life. Being the other, alien, strange in relation to majority is a type of existence that is more than familiar to Nadine Gordimer.

As a daughter of immigrant Jewish parents (her father came to escape pogroms in East

Europe, her mother was of Anglo-Jewish background<sup>1</sup>) Gordimer was already born as a type of outsider. She grew up in one of many South Africa's small mining-towns in the world of a strict social hierarchy and discrimination against all who did not fit within the ranks of Anglo-colonial social scale<sup>2</sup>. Her intensive reading and later writing<sup>3</sup> must have distanced her from the life of *'tea-parties, office-typing; love, marriage and motherhood'*<sup>4</sup> led by women of the same environment. Even later, as a white intellectual and writer in South African society, her situation was defined by marginal awareness and alienation. Given her privilege and her gradually growing world-wide fame, it seems paradoxical, but as Gordimer explains in the context of South African milieu she has always represented *"minority within a minority"*<sup>5</sup> and, thus faced double alienation. Human rights-conscious as she was, she could not but reject the value-system of the white majority while at same time knowing *"that he (the white artists) will not be accepted by black culture seeking to define itself without reference to those values that his very presence among blacks represents"*<sup>6</sup>. In a "Letter From Johannesburg, 1976" Gordimer's friend, a white photographer rephrases her concern as a question:

*How can we live in the position where, because we are white, there's no place for us but thrust among white whose racism we have rejected with disgust all our lives?*<sup>7</sup>

Gordimer's position in South African society then naturally becomes one of insecurity, ambiguity and, inevitably, isolation. As J.M. Coetzee, writing, perhaps from his own experience, remarked.

*Writing is a lonely business, writing in opposition to the community one is born into even lonelier.*<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Claudia Batsheba Braude. "Introduction". *Contemporary Jewish Writing in South Africa. An Anthology*. Ed by Claudia Batsheba Braude. David Philip 2001. pg. xxvii.

<sup>2</sup> Claudia Batsheba Braude. "Introduction". *Contemporary Jewish Writing in South Africa. An Anthology*. Ed by Claudia Batsheba Braude. David Philip 2001. pg. xxvii.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Clingman. "Introduction". Nadine Gordimer. *The Essential Gesture. Writing, Politics and Places*. Ed. by Stephen Clingman. Taurus&David Philip 1988. pg 3.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Clingman. "Introduction". Nadine Gordimer. *The Essential Gesture. Writing, Politics and Places*. Ed. by Stephen Clingman. Taurus&David Philip 1988. pg 3.

<sup>5</sup> Nadine Gordimer. "Living in the Interregnum". *The Essential Gesture. Writing, Politics and Places*. Ed. by Stephen Clingman. Taurus&David Philip 1988. pgs. 227-228.

<sup>6</sup> Nadine Gordimer. "Relevance and Commitment". *The Essential Gesture. Writing, Politics and Places*. Ed. by Stephen Clingman. Taurus&David Philip 1988. pg. 115

<sup>7</sup> Nadine Gordimer. "Letter From Johannesburg, 1976". *The Essential Gesture. Writing, Politics and Places*. Ed. by Stephen Clingman. Taurus&David Philip 1988. pg 102.

<sup>8</sup> J.M.Coetzee. "Gordimer and Turgenev". *Stranger Shores. Literary Essays. 1986-1999*. Penguin Books 2001. pg 222.

The issues of alienation, isolation and distance from the others are either implicitly or explicitly explored in both, her non-fiction (essays such as “Where do Whites Fit In?”; “Relevance and Commitment”, Letter From Johannesburg, 1976”, “Living in the Interregnum”<sup>9</sup>) and her novels; from the very early fiction such as Occasion for Loving (1963) or The Late Bourgeois World (1966) to the more recent ones, such as Burger's Daughter (1979) or July's People (1981), to be traced even in her post/apartheid prose (The House Gun(1998), The Pickup(2001)). Most often demonstrated via Gordimer's representation of white consciousness, the whites in her novels are often conscious liberals who feel responsible for the ones oppressed, eager to do good as a form of recompense. At the same time, they are conscious of their situation as privileged minority, living outside the sufferings of black majority. They experience a kind of fortress mentality, being imprisoned in their own world.

This particular condition of the painful limitations of the white privilege is depicted in the characterization of Tom and Jessie Stilwell, dedicated, white, South African liberals who are attempting to live socially-aware lives in spite of Apartheid in Gordimer's third novel Occasion for Loving. Their attempt eventually fails:

*They believed in the integrity of personal relations against the distortions of laws and society. What stronger and more proudly personal bond was there than love? Yet even between lovers they had seen blackness count, the personal return inevitably to the social, the private to the political. There was no recess of being, no emotion so private that white privilege did not single you out there.*<sup>10</sup>

The double alienation; rejection and hostility expressed by the black majority is portrayed in Burger's Daughter where the heroine, Rosemary Burger, finds the alliance with her black comrades impossible.

*Why do you think you should be different from all other whites who've been shitting on us ever since they came...*<sup>11</sup>

The judgment of Bray, the main character of The Guest of Honor, conveys a similar message:

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<sup>9</sup> See Nadine Gordimer. *The Essential Gesture. Writing, Politics and Places*. Ed. by Stephen Clingman. Taurus&David Philip 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Nadine Gordimer. *The Occasion for Loving*. Viking Press 1963. pg 296.

<sup>11</sup> Nadine Gordimer. *Burger's Daughter*. Penguin Books 1982. pg 76

*"These nice white liberals getting mixed up in things they don't understand."*<sup>12</sup>

Most profoundly are these issues explored in a novel, in many aspects analogous to The Pickup, July's people. The main character, Maureen Smales is, together with her husband and two children, displaced from her white suburb to a settlement in the bush under the guidance of her ex-servant July. The radical change of environment, and more importantly, of power relationships (the black servant formerly dependent on his white broad-minded and kind masters becomes the one responsible for the well-being of the family) demonstrates how the master-servant relationship is embedded deeply on both sides and prevents communication, relationship based on equality.

Such alienation from others is not only conveyed by representing white consciousness, but, more problematically, via the perspective of the oppressed ones as well. In many of her texts, Gordimer uses the first person to signify a black speaker or is otherwise trying to depict that person's perspective by describing and speaking for (in e.g. July's People, The House Gun, None To Accompany Me, My Son's Story). This has been a controversial aspect in her writing criticized by critics and addressed by Gordimer, herself. Some theoreticians have questioned her right to depict the experience and consciousness of a black or colored South African, claiming that it is disrespectful and bold to attempt at representation of that which she cannot possibly know<sup>13</sup>.

According to others, with such depictions, inevitably, a sense of inauthenticity emerges<sup>14</sup>.

Gordimer has defended herself against such statements claiming the primacy of imagination<sup>15</sup> and arguing that it is her right as someone who has the experience and knowledge of years living in the same country as black South Africans. As a consequence, she can dare to speak about whatever she chooses.

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<sup>12</sup> Nadine Gordimer. *The Guest of Honour*. Viking Press 1970. pg. 45

<sup>13</sup> e.g. in "Apartheid" *The Companion to African Literatures*. Ed by Gordon Douglas Killam, Ruth Rowe. Indiana University Press 2000. pg. 31, 108

Karen Lazar. "Jump and other Stories: Gordimer's Leap in to the 1990's: Gender and Politics in Her Latest Short Fiction. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No 4, Routledge December 1992. pgs. 790-1

<sup>14</sup> "I feel that whites writing about blacks is just nothing but an academic exercise. It lacks that feeling of the people. Good writing should have emotions and purpose....Whites be they writers or politicians, experience only the life of the privileged. All they can do is to just imagine the Black experience."

Mothobi Mutloase in Judie Newman. *Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter: A Casebook*. Oxford University Press 2003. pg. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Judie Newman. *Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter: A Casebook*. Oxford University Press 2003. pg 15.

*We have been not merely rubbing shoulders but truly in contact with one another; there is a whole area of life where we know each other, despite the laws, despite everything that has kept us apart...If I write about blacks I feel I have the right to do so. I know enough to do so. I accept the limitations of what I know.*<sup>16</sup>

Black African writer portraying white characters or white writer like herself portraying black consciousness who is aware of the limitations and lack of knowledge can dare to explore the other and it does not necessarily mean appropriation. Moreover, it can become a source of new self-knowledge and self-awareness inspired by the other's findings as she justifies herself in "Living in the Interregnum"<sup>17</sup>. The awareness of one's own limits perhaps denotes, as she remarked elsewhere, that she does not, in fact, "*speak for*" the blacks as she doesn't speak for whites but throughout her work she has merely "*quoted attitudes and opinions expressed by blacks themselves or (in my opinion) manifest in their work*"<sup>18</sup>. Yet such statements hardly provide adequate defense for her numerous representations of illiterate, and therefore "voiceless" black Africans (e.g. the servant July, the nameless characters in "The Ultimate Safari", the rural woman in "Amnesty"<sup>19</sup>), people hardly known to Gordimer and even if that was the case, the suspicion of their appropriation would remain intact.

### C. Journeys

The crucial problems in communication with others, the puzzling nature of human relationships, these issues are often discovered in Gordimer's narratives by a decisive act or an event that moves the characters to reassess what they had taken for granted<sup>20</sup> (urban violence in July's People, murder in The House Gun, son's discovery of his father's adultery in My Son's Story).

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<sup>16</sup> Gordimer in Karen Lazar. "Jump and other Stories: Gordimer's Leap in to the 1990's: Gender and Politics in Her Latest Short Fiction. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No 4, December 1992. pg. 791

<sup>17</sup> Nadine Gordimer. "Living in the Interregnum". *The Essential Gesture. Writing, Politics and Places*. Ed. by Stephen Clingman. Taurus&David Philip 1988. pg.

<sup>18</sup> Nadine Gordimer. "Relevance and Commitment". *The Essential Gesture. Writing, Politics and Places*. Ed. by Stephen Clingman. Taurus&David Philip 1988. pg. 118

<sup>19</sup> Both short stories come from Nadine Gordimer. *Jump and other Stories*.

<sup>20</sup> David Medalie. "'The Context of the Awful Event': Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. Routledge Dec 1999. pg. 636.



In many texts, journey or change of location is significantly related to that re-evaluation. For instance, In July's People the Smales family are displaced from their luxurious home in a city and have to adapt not only to a new, radically different environment (village life, lack of comfort) but also to new ways of thinking and being. The act of relocation offers a new perspective through which the characters have to face aspects of themselves and the place they are coming from that had been previously masked, disguised. The nature of journey to bring about a turning point in the character's self-perception, awaken characters and uncover problematic aspects of their lives became a popular device with Gordimer employed in other novels, such as Burger's Daughter (Rosa's journey to England), A Sport of Nature (Hillela's exile in Tanzania).

Various trajectories of characters in Gordimer's later fiction are closely linked to her understanding of space, a center and margin, suburb or township, interior and exterior. In many works, she tends to dichotomize space to demonstrate different “*zones of consciousness and being*”<sup>21</sup>. Journey provides the proper narrative device which makes this particular opposition and contrast possible while it appeals to the reader as credible.

#### **D. Otherness and journey in The Pickup**

This thesis focuses on one particular work by Gordimer (The Pickup) with the special attention paid to the problems of movement and otherness and their mutual interrelationship as portrayed by the novel and demonstrated by its form. While both issues represent concerns traced throughout Nadine Gordimer's prose, in The Pickup they assume particular, and perhaps, different significance. The reasons are plain enough. The historical and social context of the novel and the time it was conceived (2001) sets it apart from the majority of Gordimer's work. The Pickup is only Gordimer's second novel<sup>22</sup> set in post-apartheid South Africa, era still marked by an atmosphere of political and social change. After the fall of the Apartheid South Africa has emerged, in Gordimer's

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<sup>21</sup> Karen Lazar. “Jump and other Stories: Gordimer's Leap in to the 1990's: Gender and Politics in Her Latest Short Fiction. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No 4, December 1992. pg. 796

<sup>22</sup> First one is The House Gun.

words,

*“from the epitome of cultural isolation...cut off not only from Europe and the Americas, but also from the continent to which we belong.....”*<sup>23</sup>

The new South Africa opened up its borders and large numbers of new immigrants streamed into the country. Many of them settled as the illegal immigrants in the cities such as Johannesburg. This influx of people has, as elsewhere is the case, generating reactions of hostility among local people. Naturally, their arrival has led to higher unemployment and increased poverty<sup>24</sup>. The problems of xenophobia, displacement, economic exile and migration, in general, form the major themes of this novel. Yet, these problems concern all developed countries and are not specifically related to South African territory. The particular and locally significant social and political problems intervene more indirectly and affect the novel's action only marginally (e.g. the portrayal of the new multiracial elite). Unlike other texts, the world of *The Pickup* misses the intense and usual interconnectedness of private and political realm in favor of the former. Gordimer fully concentrates on the depiction of the private realm of the character's relationships, ways of communication. That is perhaps why she rejects single narrative viewpoint and adopts a multiple one. An approach that is quite different from her earlier used dominating, removed, and all-knowing narration.

The main character is Julie Summers, a classic Gordimerean character, a privileged woman yet self-conscious as far as her privilege is concerned, coming from a sheltered and materially rich background who by encountering a radically different environment is forced to reassess her values, ties, beliefs. However, her counter-part (the other) is not a young black African as would be expected (the issue of inter-racial love relationship being often explored in Gordimer's fiction).<sup>25</sup> This time it is a young Arab from an unnamed country called sometimes Abdu, sometimes Ibrahim to point out his problematic identity.

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<sup>23</sup> Gordimer in Sue Kossew. “Exile and Belonging. Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* and Eva Sallis' *The City of Sealions*. *Writing Woman, Writing Place: Contemporary Australian and South African Fiction*. Routledge 2004. pg. 166.

<sup>24</sup> Owen Sichone. “Together and apart: African refugees and immigrants in global Cape Town”. *What Holds Us Together: Social Cohesion in South Africa*. Ed by David Chidester, Philip Dexter. HSRC Press 2004. pg 126

<sup>25</sup> see *The Occasion for Loving, A Sport of Nature, My Son's Story*

Both, the character and the woman's affection for someone of Arab background, are reminiscent of an earlier short story: "Some are Born to Sweet Delight" from a collection Jump and other Stories (1991) in which a young man, Rad, whose description indicates Arab origins seduces a young English girl named Vera. Rad is renting flat in Vera's parents' house. Vera falls pregnant and Rad promises to marry her. Before their marriage, Vera is supposed to visit Rad's parents in his home country. Rad secretly puts a bomb in Vera's baggage and she together with other passengers explode over the sea<sup>26</sup>

The issues of exploitation and manipulation of one's affections, love blind to its failure to comprehend the other and finally journey that signifies the ultimate revelation (the other's betrayal, death) are depicted in quite a straightforward and expected manner. However, these very same problems are the ones that are again explored and conveyed with much more ambiguity and intricacy in the novel. Along with the old Gordimerian topics of one's privilege and possible ways of confronting the facts related to it, shifts of power, dichotomization of setting, and these issues interfere in a relationship between two people of radically different background to form the world of complexity and curious contradictions without a possibility to escape it.

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<sup>26</sup> See Nadine Gordimer. "Some are Born to Sweet Delight". *Jump and other Stories*. Penguin Books 1992. pgs 45-51.

## **II. Philosophical Digression.**

### **A. Journey as movement. Deleuze and Guattari.**

The central metaphor that serves as a guide through the whole thesis is the notion of journey in its various forms. Before we start to analyze the novel itself it seems necessary to examine more closely what journey is and how it may be defined in the context of the novel.

Be it journey as displacement or voluntary relocation, journeys are what defines character's existence that seems always somehow in flux, on the move or ready to move. The characters' world then becomes a mirror image of the world we are living in. While it is true that migration and movement has always been a part of our civilization, in the contemporary context of globalization, the world is, indisputably, in a constant state of flux. Our environment is constantly changing due to the great number of migrating people, exiles or refugees. Territorial security slowly vanishes from our milieu. And so is the novel a realm where, as we shall see where contingency becomes the law not only present in the movement and its circumstances, but in people themselves.

The characters' trajectories produce a shape that is by no means seen as a mere background, static pattern that can be classified, it comes to dominate the novel and emerges as a space that is difficult to trace for it seems impossible to define. It forever changes, lacks linearity. To understand that particular nature of the movement the notion of rhizome found in Thousand Plateaus by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari serves as an appropriate theoretical vehicle.

The world as constant and contingent flux. It is this experience that inevitably challenges human communication, fossilized patterns of behavior and conventionality which one blindly accepts as given when he/she feels rooted. The knowledge and being as such must be inevitably defined as the experience of otherness for it is mainly the experience of “an outsider” that constitutes impressions of a traveler. The relationship with others becomes more unsettling and disturbing for the others become even more distant and unreachable by the alienating circumstances. As a consequence, one is forced to reflect in a more profound way on who the others

are and what one's actual relationships are.

## B. French philosophy and otherness

The problem of otherness explicated via analysis of the literary text in question is an old one and dates back to antiquity; since then many scholars and philosophers have elaborated on the problem. However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the theme of inter-subjectivity - the relationship of "I" and "other" - has dominated philosophy. Regarding the milieu of post-war France the new interest in otherness was initiated by lectures on G.W.F. Hegel delivered by Alexander Kojève and his peculiar interpretation of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. These lectures included also the problem of otherness as explicated by Hegelian dialectic of master and slave. Kojève's sessions made possible the fusion with the writings of E. Husserl and M. Heidegger and the birth of existentialism in France<sup>27</sup>.

Many intellectuals and future important philosophers had been among Kojève's audience (e.g. Emmanuel Levinas for whom alterity represented a major concern). Even though it remains a question whether Jean-Paul Sartre attended the lectures, it is certain that he knew Hegelian philosophy via Kojève's explications<sup>28</sup>. He departs from Husserl's phenomenology and works with problems analyzed by Heidegger as well. This trio of these major continental philosophers stands in background of his position as manifest in the major work of the early period of his writing, Being and Nothingness.<sup>29</sup> Despite the work's tense and difficult argumentation (especially in the Introduction) there are more lucid passages where Sartre employs his art of a novel-writer to demonstrate some of the philosophical problems. I use such fictional example of „The Look“ to analyze problems of inter-subjectivity in the novel.

Like Sartre's philosophy, the thought of Jacques Derrida is considered to stem from a

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<sup>27</sup> Miroslav Petříček. *Úvod do současné filosofie*. Herrmann a synové 1991.pg 53

<sup>28</sup> Bruce Baugh. *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism*. Routledge 2003. pg 98

<sup>29</sup> Miroslav Petříček. *Úvod do současné filosofie*. Herrmann a synové 1991.pg 77

strange blending of Hegelian reading of Husserl and Heideggerian existentialism. Derrida, however, departs more radically from this tradition and represents what came to be called the poststructuralist reaction against phenomenology<sup>30</sup>. In 1960's Levinas and his concept of otherness enchant Derrida later to write two essays where he interacts with the philosophy of the former. What is most commonly stressed as the debt owed to Levinas is the conception of alterity as similarly absolute; the other as a domain which by definition must elude any attempt to grasp it.<sup>31</sup> Even though the work of Derrida is not employed directly its reading serves as a main theoretical instrument for Gayatri Spivak and her notion of the subaltern adopted to interpret the issue of the voiceless other, the social and cultural difference.

The last form in which the problem of otherness emerges in the novel is an encounter with a natural element. This particular confrontation is explicated using another phenomenologist perspective, one by Gaston Bachelard's and his understanding of inner space. Bachelard was originally a French historian of science and epistemologist who later shifted to elaborate on imagination. Reverie, the creative daydream, plays a key role in Bachelard's later philosophy, which becomes increasingly phenomenological in a manner alluding to Husserl<sup>32</sup>. In Poetics of Space he ponders upon space as the habitat of human consciousness, and examines how what it does to consciousness or the half-dreaming consciousness Bachelard calls reverie<sup>33</sup>.

### C. Representation

Many of these theories (e.g. by Derrida, Spivak or Deleuze and Guattari) are self-reflective and touch upon the issue of the very presentation of the problems they are discussing. While all of these thinkers seem to agree that the issues they are working with (rhizome, otherness) are

<sup>30</sup> „Sartre, Foucault and Derrida.“. *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*. Ed by Nicholas Bunnin and E.P. Tsui-James. Blackwell Publishing 2003. pg 860

<sup>31</sup> Lawlor, Leonard, "Jacques Derrida", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. ed. Edward N. Zalta <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2006/entries/derrida/>> (2 Jan. 2008)

<sup>32</sup> Christina Chimisso. *Gaston Bachelard: The Critic of Science and the Imagination*. Routledge 2001 pg. 223

<sup>33</sup> Joan Ockman. "The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard". *Harvard Design Magazine*. Mit Press 2001. pg. 23

something that cannot be mastered or even conceptualized from one's own vantage point, they differ in the way they approach the problem. The issue fundamental for any discourse concerned is then the problem of how to communicate the problem. What type of language is adequate and whether there is any at all.

### III. Journey and the “pickup”

#### A. The poem.

*Let us go to another country  
Not yours or mine  
And start again.  
To another country? Which?  
One without fires, where fever  
Lurks under leaves, and water  
Is sold to those who thirst?  
And carry dope or papers  
In our shoes to save us starving?  
Hope would be our passport,  
The rest is understood  
Just say the word.  
(Sorry, don't remember how it ends)*

*She has read it aloud to him, but it is meant for her<sup>34</sup>.*

“*Let us go to another country*” – the novel begins with an invitation, a calling, and a proposition. Let us leave the familiar world, the known, the habitual, and routine, the intimacy of one's shelter, the mode of thinking and feeling that defines our sense of security and rootedness; that what you call “*yours*” and what I call “*mine*”. Let us “*start again*”; leave the comfort of everything notorious and granted and migrate across physical and inner borders. Let us explore what is new and intoxicating but, at the same time, unstable and threatening for it brings about the feeling of being vulnerable once again. Let us set off upon the journey. “*Just say the word. The rest is understood*”.

The poem's name is “Another Country” and it was written by William Plomer, a South African born novelist and poet. It appears twice in the novel. The first time it comes forth only three lines from the poem are chosen to be printed on a blank paper before the very first page of the novel, an extract separated from the whole text, outside of the novel's action. It emerges as a proposal, a pact to be offered to the reader before he/she dives into reading. *Just say the word*. Just agree to take part in the game of literature, leave the everyday world, enter and explore an unknown

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<sup>34</sup> Nadine Gordimer. *The Pickup*. Bloomsbury 2002. pgs 88-89.



territory of unforeseeable nature.

For reading is also a journey, perhaps the most crucial one once we speak of a journey found in writing. Reading, as well, can be wandering without a purpose, traveling/reading for the sole sake of travel/reading. One can read for a purpose, explanation, indoctrination, learning, as one is traveling while being aware of the point of destination<sup>35</sup> It is an act that, like material traveling, takes place in both, space and time. It represents a movement along the material signifiers (or its often unnoticed materiality<sup>36</sup>) where the ultimate shape of the landscape, i.e. the signified, is never fixed or completed but always elusive so that no act of reading can ever attain mastery over the object of its inquiry. At the same time, even what is found eventually in a text can never be determined beforehand for the act of reading is a part of the creation of the work<sup>37</sup>. The act of reading demands readiness to set out upon a journey towards the unknown, to encounter what is yet to be defined<sup>38</sup>.

And perhaps as the universe remains a mystery to a traveler who remains incapable of decoding finally all what he encounters in the course of his/her journey, so is reading similarly reductive. For written text like the universe is characteristic for its indeterminable potential, a subversive nature that resists any rational totalization. For whatever landscape is painted in the mind of a reader after a reading experience there is always that which remains excluded from the picture. Total understanding is never possible.

The second time the poem comes forth it is already fully integrated into the narrative situation but yet incomplete. While before it was the author addressing the readers, now the situation becomes more complex but yet repeats itself. The author creates a character-mediator, the poet, to address Julie Summers, to hand her a piece of paper folded with the poem inside. Gordimer lets Julie address herself by reading the poem aloud to her lover. It becomes a very important

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<sup>35</sup> Alberto Manguel. *Dějiny čtení*. Host 2007.

<sup>36</sup> "giving signifying function to materiality – the blanks, the typefaces, the placement on the page..." Barbara Johnson. "On Writing". *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed by Julie Rivkin, Michael Ryan. Blackwell Publishing 2004. pg. 346.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon Graham. "Derrida and deconstruction." *Philosophy of the Arts. An Introduction to Aesthetics*. Routledge 2005 pg. 169

<sup>38</sup> "Reading is going toward something that is about to be, and no one yet knows what it will be" Calvino in Beno Weiss. *Understanding Italo Calvino*. University of South Carolina Press 1993. pg 177

moment in the novel for it is the reading of the poem that moves Julie to take action, to leave everything behind, to follow her lover. Julie, herself a character in a novel, suddenly becomes a reader as well. She becomes a mirror image of us, the readers of the novel. Like us she decides to follow the calling of the poem and agrees to set off on a journey. Unlike many of us, however, she makes the poem material. Real life with its actual problems and hardship is often perceived as being in direct opposition to literature for its slippery and dream-like nature. This event in the narrative, however, is an implicit acknowledgment and celebration of the power of literature and its interconnectedness with real life. Literature has the potential to affect reality directly. Fiction and reality are interlinked.

## **B. The end and the beginning**

Perhaps not surprisingly, the very beginning of the novel is articulated as a journey. However, it is a journey as a failure, journey at a standstill, journey under threat. There is no introduction, no beginning. We are immediately thrown into the midst of action, Julie is already on her journey when the curtain moves up and we become witnesses of how the battery inside her ostentatiously second-hand car goes flat, causing a traffic jam. The means of transport, the vehicle and instrument chosen to help Julie reach the destination point has failed her. The consequence of this unfortunate accident is an intense experience of a dead point in the middle of chaos of the rush hour in an overcrowded city. Inertia and paralysis in the first eight lines of the narrative instead of movement and action.

The novel greets us in a figurative language: “*Clustered predators round a kill.*”<sup>39</sup> It is a metaphor creating an atmosphere of urban jungle, unrestricted violence, and immediate danger. The first image of Julie we are receiving is one of a potential victim standing face to face to her pursuers sitting inside their cars that represent their deadly instruments. As if there was something already inevitably doomed in the air. Julie as well as the novel seem to be facing a

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<sup>39</sup> Gordimer 3

standstill, an obstacle which hinders the movement forward. While the plot is in the process of being conceived the threat of a halt is already there. Julie stands helpless unable to cope with her haywire car and, moreover, is herself an obstacle to the traffic mob that threatens to swallow her as if she were a stone of a fruit reluctant to be taken out. Standstill and immobility along with merciless dynamism of a city out of control. Surrender in the city jungle without escape. - "*Her hands thrown up, open*"<sup>40</sup>

It is an end of a journey, yet one pregnant with possibilities. It is a moment of inaction but with a rudiment of that which is yet to come. The ultimate end is not allowed to take place. Julie, despite being cornered, is determined to complete her journey. She is decisive; ready to confront the hostile faces of her fellow men-drivers who are shouting at her words in a language she does not know. It is her self-confidence that prevents her journey from being terminated, instead, it is merely reversed, forced to change its direction and take an unexpected turn. One journey's failure is a promise and hope for another one. The novel is allowed to take place; the threat of an ultimate halt is overcome and survives only as a cause to justify all the action that follows.

The optimistic vigor represented by Julie's decisiveness on the one hand, and the threat of urban chaos and potential impossibility of individual action, create a dichotomic nature of the narrative's introduction. The interaction between these two aspects resembles the Nietzschean dynamism of the Dionysian and Apollonian principle. Julie's resolute gesture saves the form and structure of the novel and prevents the collapse of the narrative. Order wins over disintegration. Also, her act is one of individuation by which she separates herself from the chaos and inertia of the urban jungle (the chaos of life; primordial unity). Finally, it is an optimistic gesture, the Apollonian veil that creates the calming and soothing appearance that wards off the ultimate meaninglessness of life, life as a journey or journey as such.

The Dionysian principle is already hinted at in the initial poem. There is a hope explicitly stated by Plomer's verse but also a sense of uncertainty, doubt concerning the point of destination; an implicit

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<sup>40</sup> Gordimer 4

insight into futility and despair of human destiny. David E. Roessel actually proposes that Plomer's verses begin with a direct evocation of C.P. Cavafy's very sinister poem "The City"<sup>41</sup>:

*You said: "I'll go to another country, go to another shore,  
find another city better than this one.  
Whatever I try to do is fated to turn out wrong  
and my heart lies buried like something dead.  
How long can I let my mind moulder in this place?  
Wherever I turn, wherever I look,  
I see the black ruins of my life, here,  
where I've spent so many years, wasted them, destroyed them. totally."  
You won't find a new country, won't find another shore.  
This city will always pursue you...<sup>42</sup>*

The poem with its insight into senselessness, meaninglessness of any journey expresses Nietzsche's Dionysian pessimism towards existence in general. The city is painted as an inescapable prison of life of absurdity and failure born with any action. It is a poem where inertia and inaction are inevitable, all else is irrelevant. Action and hope symbolized by a journey is merely an Apollonian escape, perhaps promising and healing but, inevitably illusory:

*In this sense the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have for once penetrated into the true nature of things,—they have perceived, but it is irksome for them to act; for their action cannot change the eternal nature of things; the time is out of joint and they regard it as shameful or ridiculous that they should be required to set it right. Knowledge kills action, action requires the veil of illusion<sup>43</sup>*

The journey is introduced by two poems which exist in one, each representing one aspect of the dynamism. It comes as an ambiguity, as meaningfulness and meaninglessness at the same time. Be it for the Dionysian principle only, the novel as we know it would certainly disintegrate (Julie would be run over by cars? She would go insane, collapse?) . However, the narrative we are about to enter provides the very veil of illusion that will allow action to continue, that is, in the form of the Apollonian dream-state. There lies its redemptive (but illusory?) quality. And so with the necessary dynamism of these two principles; the dichotomy of sense and senselessness, action and inertia, optimism and despair, is the beginning of the narrative announced.

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<sup>41</sup> David E. Roessel. *In Byron's Shadow: Modern Greece in the English and American Imagination*. Oxford University Press 2003. pg. 246

<sup>42</sup> Edmund Keeley. *Cavafy's Alexandria*. Princeton University Press 1996. pg 15

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Transl. By Douglas Smith. Oxford University Press 2000. pg 46

C. The journey as the pickup

Before we let the unemployed black men come to Julie's rescue, it is necessary to turn our attention to what comes before the initial journey, even before the introductory poem – the title. The name of the book is peculiar both in its form and denotation. It is a nominal derivative of the phrasal verb *pick up*, rich in meaning, both formal and informal. Its semantic role in a sentence may refer to a patient of action. One that is picked up (a passenger or hitchhiker), a stranger with whom one makes casual acquaintance, often in expectation of sexual relations<sup>44</sup>. It may, however, also denote the agent of the action, i.e. the one who picks up<sup>45</sup>. This patient/agent ambivalence of the noun expresses ambiguity found in all of the action throughout the novel. Are the characters in control over their doings and whereabouts? Or, are they being manipulated, used, and taken advantage of? Who picks up whom? Who uses whom? It never is apparent.

The pickup also refers to a specific state of being with others, being related to or involved with a group of people for a temporary purpose<sup>46</sup>. In terms of the novel, however, the term comes to signify something more profound. It alludes to a type of relationship, one without patterns of reciprocal obligations or any responsibility. Attachment which is unstable and temporary. For Julie it is the only sense of rootedness, security and intimacy of human affection that she comes to experience. Her life is a sequence of networks of loose and provisional relationships. Hunted by the lack of fixed and permanent shelter, her journeys are always quests for home, some vague sense of belonging.

The Table is a materialization of such a quest. Yet, it is merely “a pickup”; a network of temporary, unfixed and accidental relationships. It is loose and difficult to identify. It consists of people at the very margin of society, the various prototypes of outsiders, be them unacknowledged artists,

<sup>44</sup> “pickup”. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Houghton Mifflin Company 2000. pg. 1328

<sup>45</sup> “pickup”. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Houghton Mifflin Company 2000. pg. 1328

<sup>46</sup> “pickup”. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Houghton Mifflin Company 2000. pg. 1328

bohemians of various sort, or the unemployed. Coming and going, free of commitment, they are open-minded, free-thinking and understanding. What is missing, however, is intimacy, real concern:

*“She feels she never knew them, any of them, in the real sense of knowing .....”*<sup>47</sup>

For what makes The Table serve its purpose are not individuals but The Table itself as the mecca, the symbol of gathering that gives it its strength and purpose. Once you leave The Table, the mutual interest that exists among the people who gather at EL-EY transforms into indifference:

*The friends are not the kind to ask what's going on, that's part of their creed: whatever you do, love, whatever happens, hits you, mate, Bra, that's all right with me. People come and go among them; so long as they remain faithful among themselves, gathered at The Table.*<sup>48</sup>

Julie's very initial ride that leads to El-Ey is, therefore, a return “home”. However, it is a home which represents a mere “pickup”, makeshift that is unsure and unreliable. To pick up and abandon whenever convenient.

The Table is a materialized escape from another “home”, that of her family, the first link of the pattern of pickups that is directed from the very center of the society to its margins, eventually to escape it entirely<sup>49</sup>. Is her family a pickup? Can one's family be a pickup? It certainly lacks the semantic ambiguity. One who is born into privilege or the lack of one hasn't had the option to choose the absence of it. The economic and social success or the tumid disdain for one cannot make it nonexistent. It is a restraint that is fixed, immovable. Restraint of liberty that Julie will never be able to free herself from. A paradox.

Yet, it remains a pickup in some sense. It is not a place of unconditioned love and understanding, something fixed and secure. The kind of intimacy that exists between Julie and her parents is conditioned<sup>50</sup>, casual, unstable and lax, another provisional shelter to abandon.

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<sup>47</sup> Gordimer 91

<sup>48</sup> Gordimer 5

<sup>49</sup> Gordimer 129-130 - “Nigel Ackroyd Summers she has removed herself from, far as she could, by way of the EL-AY Cafe and a man without papers or a name;”

<sup>50</sup> Gordimer 98 - “Make something of your life and all the advantages you've had – including your freedom.”

## D. Pickup encounters

*“To be open to encounters”* that is a phrase determining Julie's approach to the accidental meeting between her and Abdu-Ibrahim; it is also a motto of the company at The Table. Picking up people, forming an alliance with whatever or whomever available. Getting to know someone/something represents always a potential, a promise. The pickup then is an embodiment of a specific directness, straightforwardness, expectations directed towards others, life in general. Being as a random chance to take advantage of, a hit-and-miss trajectory that is entirely contingent and free to bend to or avoid whatever is at hand. It is all about a momentary impulse, mood, and moment of attraction. There are no rules to be observed, it is difficult to identify the pattern (who picked up whom?). It is a continual, sometimes mutual, forming of temporary connections. No limits to be set but a passing urge. *“Oh yes, she wants.”*<sup>51</sup>

The habit of picking up people is a characteristic feature of Julie and the people around her. It is a typical aspect of their nonconformist and noncommittal lifestyle, one that is the very opposite of a bound and rooted life that is represented by the world of the village that we encounter in the second half of the novel. Life in the village represent static, stable existence that has a center around which it evolves, i.e. the village as such (or the mother, family?), which then becomes a place where one is bound to return to no matter how one resists such obligation (Abdu-Ibrahim). The society of the village is represented by a rigid social hierarchy (based on gender, age), unity, order (a given value system - Islam). There is no room for contingency, everything is determined, expectable. Accepted life patterns are simply followed. One knows where one is coming from or where one is going.

*“And here she has been in this house giving us birth, feeding us, boiling water to clean us.”* <sup>52</sup>

Encounters that take place within static, in this sense “traditional” mode of existence establish strong ties that have their finite place, they are traceable, and they are remembered. Unlike people at

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<sup>51</sup> Gordimer 106

<sup>52</sup> Gordimer 137

The Table or Nigel Ackroyd Summer's, inhabitants of the village have names, significance in Julie's or Abdu-Ibrahim's lives (Maryam, Khadija). Such encounters guarantee security, intimacy, and mutual trust. Ephemeral encounters, the pickups, on the other hand, take place once life becomes torn out of its roots and what emerges is constant coming and going, picking up and leaving behind. Such journey is then typified by digression, constant changing of direction, mutation.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari use botanical terminology of “root”, “tree”, “rhizome“, or “bulb” in their introductory essay to A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia to distinguish between linear and vertical structures (i.e. the roots of a tree) on the one hand, and multiplicities of heterogeneous nature on the other (i.e. the rhizome). The plants whose branches or roots are all connected to a main, vertical stem (the tree, “arborescent” structure). The rhizome, however, does something quite different. It functions as a principle in which one element is connected to others of a different structure. It spreads out as a dense net just below the surface. It has roots, but each root represents many others— each branch grows out of others.<sup>53</sup>

Once we focus on the mechanism of the characters' movement and their approach toward encounters with others we find out it is either rhizomatic or aborescent in its nature depending what setting of the novel we find ourselves at. As regards The Table or Nigel Ackroyd Summer's house the movement is defined rather by the former. It is characterized by a pickup: somebody picks somebody up, they collide and stick. They stay together; perhaps combine with something else again to form a larger combination.<sup>54</sup> A single pickup of two anonymous or, perhaps long forgotten people becomes a multiple one, The Table or the Summers' circle. We do not wonder that strangers are always accepted to become part of it<sup>55</sup>, they promise growth, further development of the pickup/rhizome. Yet the pickup may be also reduced. People come and go forming a loose network

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<sup>53</sup> William Bogard. “Sense and Segmentarity: Some Markers of a Deleuzian-Guattarian Sociology”. *Sociological Theory*. Blackwell Publishing 1998. pg. 60.

<sup>54</sup> Brian Massumi. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. MIT Press 1996. pgs. 47-48.

<sup>55</sup> Gordimer 39 - Julie's father tells her: “You can bring anyone you like, your friends are always welcome, you know that.”



without distinct or fixed boundaries<sup>56</sup>. We cannot trace neither the origin of The Table nor the circle of Julie's father acquaintances, it seems like it has always been there. It is an ongoing activity; there is no real beginning like there is no identifiable source of a rhizome.

*The name of his café was a statement. A place for the young; but also one where old survivors of the quarter's past, ageing Hippies and Leftist Jews, grandfathers and grandmothers of the 1920's immigration who had not become prosperous bourgeois, could sit over a single coffee.*

Both networks, the one of The Table and the one gathered around the Summers demonstrate other rhizomatic functions as well. Both work as a kind of tube, a root which grows other roots. As an encounter it bears potential of other pickups, it spreads spatially, it grows at a spot, it grows offshoots.

Like the “relocating” couple who leave the Summers' circle to move where their business interests lead them, or, more importantly, Julie who, too, becomes such an offshoot. Being on her way to The Table she picks up Abdu-Ibrahim. The newly formed pickup then attaches itself to other pickups and that is precisely the manner in which The Table rhizome scatters in all directions. Similarly, however, Julie might be an offshoot of the clan around Nigel Ackroyd Summers. Or she might be the offshoot of the metropolitan chaos of Johannesburg to be planted in a desert, in the countryside, always becoming a root, a bulb, one that grows stems, filaments, other roots, other bulbs for she is always picking up, forming temporary alliances with countries, people, animals. Like Abdu-Ibrahim.

When discriminating the two principles, it is important to stress that Deleuze and Guattari consciously reject any dualism or dichotomy of aborescent structures and the rhizomatic ones. Based on their thought, these two principles do not exclude each other; on the contrary, they intersect, merge, penetrate, and develop inside each other<sup>57</sup>. Likewise, it is impossible to clearly differentiate between root and rhizomatic structures in the novel, e.g. between “root” encounters and “rhizomatic” pickups. Rhizomatic aspects emerge in the aborescent setting of the village

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<sup>56</sup> Gordimer 5 - “.....where she would habitually meet friends and friends of friends, whoever turned up.”

<sup>57</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari. “Introduction: Rhizome.” *Postmodernism. Critical Concepts. Volume I. Foundational Essays*. Routledge 2002. pg. 115

(through Julie and Abdu-Ibrahim) and rooted and stable relationships (e.g. intimacy and security in the unconditioned affection of Dr Archibald Charles Summers, Julie's uncle) are present even in the rhizomatic environment of the city.

The novel as well defies such binary logic and maintains deep ambiguity. Therefore, the pickups found in the novel demonstrate at times root-like characteristics. We can never be absolutely certain. Is it a temporary, intimate and secure alliance or ephemeral pickup? Such is the relationship between Julie and Abdu-Ibrahim as the latter's constant doubts reveal.

*“the day when she packed the elegant suitcase and went away, this adventure worn thin, as it will.”*<sup>58</sup>

Such is Julie's alliance with Abdu-Ibrahim family.

## **E. Writing as a map or tracing**

Rhizomes are metaphors that may describe different systems and structures and may assume very diverse forms. According to Deleuze and Guattari, however, there are certain principles that characterize them. One of them is the principle of cartography and decalcomania. This criterion differentiates between a map and a tracing which is related to the hierarchy and linearity of the roots system. While the rhizome as a map is experimentation with reality, a performance, tracing as the aborescent structure is representative<sup>59</sup>. According to this idea, the pickup always represents movement that is being created at the moment, one that is always open to new connections and modifiable for, like a rhizome, it has numerous entries and exits. It is a performance not representation because it is not dependent on anything outside of the map.

It is the novel itself that seems to be the actual tracing based on the fact that it attempts to trace the movement which inevitably escapes it. According to Deleuze and Guattari, as a tracing it is

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<sup>58</sup> Gordimer 137

<sup>59</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari. “Introduction: Rhizome.” *Postmodernism. Critical Concepts. Volume I. Foundational Essays*. Routledge 2002. pg. 121.

by its definition selective and restrictive for it chooses to reproduce only certain aspects in order to create a model, an image of what can never be properly represented.

*It is like a photograph or X ray that begins by selecting or isolating, by artificial means such as colorations or other restrictive procedures, what it intends to reproduce. The imitator always creates the model, and attracts it. The tracing has already translated the map into an image; it has already transformed the rhizome into roots and radicles. ...It has generated, structuralized the rhizome, and when it thinks it is reproducing something else it is in fact only reproducing itself.<sup>60</sup>*

What the novel as the tracing actually demonstrates is a series of fixed points, linear narrative with hierarchical principles, central axis, and structured construction, i.e. aborescent rather than rhizomatic aspects.

For instance, the center of attention, the agent of narrative action is mostly Julie. It is she who dominates the narrative, unites all that is happening. She is the logical device to help us follow the plot. Such hierarchy makes the text structured, comprehensible, and logical. It is here, for example, that the rhizome escapes. In a rhizomatic universe, Julie would be perceived to be as important as other elements, no more, no less<sup>61</sup>. A mere radicle moving from one root to grow others. There are no individuals; all is just a complex mechanism in which various elements get involved with each other accidentally, unexpectedly.

As the novel is selective and hierarchical it creates a rationally structured and coherent story. At the same time, it attempts at the impossible; to show rhizomatic trajectories by means of representation while the rhizome by its own definition must burrow under such depiction. The result is a tension of a failure, however, one that is unsettling, disturbing, and creative. Like Julie's initial journey it is the rudiment for something else to come. For how it would be even possible to discuss or sense the rhizomatic structures in the novel?

Perhaps, the rhizome is not realized in the book itself but it is realized outside of the book structure. The reading of the text becomes map-tracing, rhizome-root assemblage. While the nature of the

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<sup>60</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari. "Introduction: Rhizome." *Postmodernism. Critical Concepts. Volume I. Foundational Essays*. Routledge 2002. pgs. 113-114

<sup>61</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari. "Introduction: Rhizome." *Postmodernism. Critical Concepts. Volume I. Foundational Essays*. Routledge 2002. pg 117. - "Individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their state at a given moment."

book is one of tracing, the reader's part is one of mapping, performance. The breaking up of the center and spreading of meaning is not happening in the text, it becomes more important later, at the moment when the reader closes the book. The text allows such subversion and experimentation and in the following chapters we are going to explore precisely the features that make it possible. The activity and the division of work between the reader and the writer are then more radically shifted toward the former. When reading like traveling becomes a unique performance.

#### IV. Encounter with the other in The Pickup

Constant movement, dynamism, makeshift existence of not being rooted or having roots in multiple places poses the problem of identity and how it is formed. Such “rhizomatic” identity must be necessarily marked by multiplicity, discontinuity. It must be rather concerned with the relationship toward the other than with the notion of sameness that helps to form identity in a fixed position. Precisely that relationship along with the problem how to grasp what is different from the self becomes a major issue in The Pickup that is mirrored in both, its form and content. How the world of self is related to the world of the other keeps re-emerging on various levels of different relationships be it in very general terms of inter-subjectivity or more specific ones, e.g. differences of social class, culture or sex.

##### A. Narrative mode and distance

*“Where did Julie pick him up?”<sup>62</sup>*

She “picked him up” in a garage, a very symbolic place indeed. Like *The Table* it is another site of transition, space of coming and going of people and their vehicles. This time cars are only “helpless, harmless victims”<sup>63</sup> to be again transformed into deadly weapons once it is necessary to fight one's way in the jammed streets of Johannesburg. A place of repair, fix, altered journeys. Place where failures are transformed into new directions, where the course of the narrative, its standstill is again transformed into action by a crucial encounter. It is where Julie's car is being fixed by the picked up stranger as his and Julie's (and the novel's) ultimate fate is being determined. However, who is this stranger picked up by Julie? Who is Julie herself? The characters' schemes and intentions remain vague and indeterminate. Apparently, we do not have a direct access into the

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<sup>62</sup> Gordimer 22

<sup>63</sup> Gordimer 7

private world of the characters; neither does the narrator that is what the narrative voice explicitly claims.

*“You're not there; I'm not there: to see. It's not a traffic tangle in the streets, hands going up in culpability, surrender, owing this, open to the public. It's not the spectacle available late-night on adult TV.”*<sup>64</sup>

The narrative mode of the novel is a third-person narrative, but a limited one. In this mode, the readers together with the narrator observe the situation from the outside through the perspective of a focal character (reflector-character), it being shifted from Julie to Abdu-Ibrahim throughout the course of the narrative. The role of the narrator is, however, ambiguous and paradoxical. While humbly disclosing its limitations, at times it behaves in a confident and forceful way asserting authorial self-assurance. It explicitly states that it offers particular insight we wouldn't otherwise have. It is limited and omniscient at once.

*There. You've seen. I've seen. The gesture. A woman in a traffic jam among those that are everyday in the city, any city. You won't remember it; you won't know who she is. But I know because from the sight of her I'll find out – as a story – what was going to happen as the consequence of the commonplace embarrassment on the streets; where it was heading her for and what.*<sup>65</sup>

The narrative voice comments on and depicts the action taken by the characters but only rarely we are given interior monologues<sup>66</sup>. The purpose is plain enough. Direct insight into their plans, feelings, and perspectives would prevent the misunderstanding and distance existing between the characters to have its full impact. Our confusion in terms of the characters' actual intentions only mirror the manner in which the characters are puzzled and mistaken about each other and bring us towards closer understanding of the distance existing between them.

## **B. Characters' masks**

The confusion omnipresent in the communication between the main characters in the novel

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<sup>64</sup> Gordimer 23

<sup>65</sup> Gordimer 4

<sup>66</sup> e.g. Abdu-Ibrahim's monologue in Gordimer 93-95

is not surprising because of the numerous self-evident differences. They come from very different cultural and social environment; they speak different languages, and, importantly, are of different sex. These differences create a perfect environment for an intricate play of various masks, appearances, identities which combine and intermingle. It is quite symptomatic that during their first encounter Abdu-Ibrahim actually refuses to introduce himself. In the greased disguise of his overalls his true identity remains evasive and blurred not only for Julie but for the reader as well.

*"I'll give you a call when it is ready – you are Mr....?  
Ask for Abdu."*<sup>67</sup>

The "*nobody Abdu*"<sup>68</sup> is a mask but so is Julie's wrecked car which she brings to the garage in order to have it fixed. Ostentatiously second-hand to disguise her privileged background, though in the eyes of Abdu-Ibrahim, as it appears, it is a cover that is quite transparent. All the same, they both project a mask on each other. It is a mask that somehow helps them survive in the metropolis, makes invisible characteristics (Julie's privilege, Abdu-Ibrahim's illegality) that threaten to decisively determine the way other people perceive them. It is a mask that makes them unnoticed, nothing out of ordinary to escape the constraints of their social role. A mask that is, however, always somehow imperfect and defective.

There is a striking discrepancy between how each of the main characters perceive himself/herself, how he/she wants to be perceived (the mask), and the way he/she is eventually perceived by the other (the defectiveness of the mask). The other either refuses to consider the mask at all or interprets it differently. This situation creates a gap that seems impassable and creates more and more unwanted impressions and misjudgments. The luxurious car which is the occasion for the second accidental encounter is a convincing evidence of this disproportion. It is a symbol of privilege that Julie does not consider as belonging to her, something she refuses to identify with. However, it is something that directly reveals to Abdu-Ibrahim who she is in terms of the social status and class she comes from and, interestingly, it is something that Abdu-Ibrahim paradoxically truly admires. The appearance she proposes is simply ignored.

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<sup>67</sup> Gordimer 8

<sup>68</sup> Gordimer 31

*"That's a car...."*

*"It is not mine! She claimed her identity:"*<sup>69</sup>

This particular misunderstanding over who they really are or who the other is based on their different apprehension of one's identity. The concept of identity is more than frequently used in various fields of humanities, yet the definition of what it actually signifies remains obscure<sup>70</sup>. James D. Fearon argues that the concept as we use it nowadays is used in two mutually related senses; one may be called "social" and the other "personal". In the former sense it refers to a social category, a group of people who are often designated by a label, characterized by a set of general rules, typical features or attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, it is a set of characteristic that a person takes a special pride. It is usually a source of individual self-respect or dignity which cannot be expressed in terms of social categories<sup>71</sup>.

Based on her actions and behavior, we may claim that Julie doesn't understand these two meanings of identity as interrelated. She seems to believe that individual's social status and background are more or less irrelevant. She likes to imagine herself and others as individuals whose identity is entirely liable to themselves only and can be created anew regardless of one's history. She refuses to allow the system of social class to imprint on her its identification marks and she defies it by self-imposed marginalization, be it the alliance with The Table, Abdu-Ibrahim or a desert village. She truly believes that this particular appearance is a very important part of her identity, it is something that forms her approach to things and people. While she seems to convince herself, she definitely fails at convincing others, Abdu-Ibrahim, his employer or The Table. Despite her effort, they sense the privilege lurking behind her back.

*"Thinking of her father, yes; there's always been an undercurrent of keen awareness of her father's money The Table concealed from Julie..."*<sup>72</sup>

*"...she had class, you could see, never mind the kind of clothes all that crowd at the cafés wear, not*

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<sup>69</sup> Gordimer 9

<sup>70</sup> James D. Fearon. "What Is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)?" *Department of Political Science, Stanford University*. Nov 3, 1999. <[www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf)> (Jan 2, 2008) pg. 3

<sup>71</sup> James D. Fearon. "What Is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)?" *Department of Political Science, Stanford University*. Nov 3, 1999. <[www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf)> (Jan 2, 2008) pg. 3

<sup>72</sup> Gordimer 87



*all the whites had class around these streets, but she had.*<sup>73</sup>

One explanation may be that her act is always a bit showy and ostentatious and her rather theatrical lack of concern concerning social classification and categories is very likely to be interpreted as upper-class liberty granted only to few. Or perhaps there is something that one can never get rid of no matter what one does. Perhaps, there is a kind of social marking that we are raised with and that labels us in the eyes of others despite our efforts to disguise our social background.

Abdu-Ibrahim, on the contrary, considers seriously material signs of social status and perceives himself as well as others, mainly in terms of social and economic success or failure. He rarely views Julie as a unique and particular human being, most often he sees her merely as a typical representative of a certain social status, as a specimen of a privileged class.

*"She came into the garage like any of their women who have a car husband or father has given them, and the freedom they are not even aware of to go about wherever they please and talk to a strange man, giving orders....."*<sup>74</sup>

Abdu-Ibrahim simply believes that social position determines the value of an individual. Since he is an illegal immigrant, he sees himself as nobody - *"a greasy monkey without a name"*<sup>75</sup> and acts accordingly. For the same reasons he doesn't understand Julie purposely denying herself the rights and privilege of her class.

*"Why do you choose those friends. Instead of your family."*<sup>76</sup>

Unlike Julie, Abdu-Ibrahim acknowledges and fully recognizes that his mask is a mere mask. His mask is a self-imposed one, however, it is one that more or less matches his actual social status (of somebody unwanted, unaccepted, one of many). That is why in projecting the *nobody* appearance he is far more successful than Julie. His employer, Julie's friends and family really consider him as someone essentially insignificant, *"poor devil"*, everybody<sup>77</sup> but Julie. She like Abdu-Ibrahim is

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<sup>73</sup> Gordimer 31

<sup>74</sup> Gordimer 94

<sup>75</sup> Gordimer 49

<sup>76</sup> Gordimer 62

<sup>77</sup> Gordimer 32, 92

aware that beneath the nobody there is a man who is somebody<sup>78</sup>. The question is whether he is what she sees (the husband, her home, the family) or whether the somebody who is under the mask is just another appearance he allows to be imposed on him by another society, something towards which he feels similarly alienated.

### C. The tickets scene

Abdu-Ibrahim as somebody who cares about appearance that is the impression we receive by observing his behavior patterns from the outside. The first inner monologue when the narrative mode changes into a first-person narrative and we are given an insight into Abdu-Ibrahim's interior world, occurs when Julie comes with a very serious proposal that is not verbalized but is represented by a gesture reminiscent of the one performed by Julie at the beginning of the novel (*"her hands thrown up, open"*<sup>79</sup>). Like other important moments of the novel<sup>80</sup> gesture instead of the verbal language is considered appropriate to convey the message. As if to demonstrate that language is too reductive to communicate what eventually determines and radically changes people's lives.

Moreover, the gesture materialized as the two airline tickets is another sign to fit in the novel's vehicle symbolism. It is a proposal of yet another journey, one that represents determination to embrace radical change as well as intention to materialize one's exile with the hope of finding home and roots elsewhere as that is certainly what Julie is looking for. It, however, also represents the resolution to encounter radical otherness be it Abdu-Ibrahim or the foreign milieu.

It is something unexpected and, definitely, as far as Abdu-Ibrahim is concerned, unlooked for.

While it represents Julie's decision, it also points out to Abdu-Ibrahim's failure at understanding the

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<sup>78</sup> Gordimer 96 - *"The man he knew himself to be beneath the nobody with a false name."*

<sup>79</sup> Gordimer 4

<sup>80</sup> Gordimer 18 - *"There are gestures that decide people's lives."*

situation. It reveals that his stock understanding of Julie is highly insufficient for it has failed to predict that something like that is likely to happen. The shock and consternation over what she has done and the realization of what she really wants creates a situation that actually forces him to look at her from a different angle. Suddenly, he is bound to ask two fundamental questions. Who are you? Who am I in your eyes?

**D. Who am I in the eyes of the other?**

First of all, it is very peculiar that the examination with which Abdu-Ibrahim observes Julie is the first detailed description of Julie's physical presence that we are given in the novel<sup>81</sup>. While the third-person narrative left Julie and Abdu-Ibrahim with a hazy appearance, the immersion into Abdu-Ibrahim interior monologue creates a clearer picture of his inner self and his view of Julie while her blurred appearance in reader's imagination is given more concrete contours. Moreover, the insight into his stream of conscience allows us to understand in what ways his perspective of Julie is disturbed and shaken for his meditation on Julie is retrospective while pondering upon the present situation at the same time. It is symptomatic that his monologue is introduced with the description of Julie more like a social category

*any of their women who have a car husband or father has given them, and the freedom they are not even aware of*<sup>82</sup>

and ends with recognition of her unique importance.

*“She knows something.....The capacity returned to him, for this foreigner makes him whole.”*<sup>83</sup>

However, what happens in the meantime? What makes him so radically change his perspective? Until now Abdu-Ibrahim has not been fully aware of how the other, i.e. Julie, sees him. What is different in this confrontation is that something becomes visible, it is not just “seen” but it is

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<sup>81</sup> Gordimer 93-94  
<sup>82</sup> Gordimer 94  
<sup>83</sup> Gordimer 96

revealed, made noticeable in Julie's gesture – *her face and body in revelation*<sup>84</sup>. Being confronted with the gesture, Abdu-Ibrahim suddenly realizes that this

*foreign girl has for him – there are beautiful words coming to him in his mother tongue-devotion.*<sup>85</sup>

Thus, Abdu-Ibrahim is suddenly absolutely exposed to the fundamental meaning that the other ascribes to him. He realizes that there is another dimension to his self that he has not been aware of. Apart from being *nobody*, somebody or any appearance he chooses, he is also an object of someone's love and *devotion*, an aspect of himself of which he isn't in full control. Julie *knows something*. The woman he is looking at somehow determines his being, takes part in the process of defining of who he is. She is the other who is part of his self, she completes him, she shows devotion towards him that he feels he cannot reject<sup>86</sup>. He feels responsible, committed to her feelings towards him. On the other hand, *she knows nothing*. She is ignorant of the actual impact of her decision, she does not really know what she is doing. She is naïve and unaware of facts, yet she remains very powerful. The *devotion* she has for him, guarantees authority and puts him in a vulnerable position. The manner in which she defines his self is a process that is beyond his control. The sense of surrender sneaks in almost unnoticed. Abdu-Ibrahim accepts Julie's proposal. The narrative situation becomes disturbing at this point. The main issue here is Julie's love confession so why we are given Abdu-Ibrahim's inner monologue and not hers? In this way we are denied a direct access to Julie's self-exposure. We find out about her revealing gesture as it is interpreted by and reflected within Abdu-Ibrahim's self.

While we do not learn about her perspective on the situation, we are given another significant aspect of Julie; an image of her that is inherently part of her but which at the same time always escapes her. It is her self as reflected in the consciousness of the other. In the end, we are given two pictures. The self as it is mirrored in the other and the self as it realizes that the other represents ungraspable dimension of the self. Being confronted with that situation through first-person

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<sup>84</sup> Gordimer 96

<sup>85</sup> Gordimer 96

<sup>86</sup> Gordimer 96

narrative we become witnesses of how the two different worlds, the world of the other and the self become infused within a character.

## E. The Look

Potential judgments of the other that are beyond one's control but yet determine one's existence are one of the crucial issues dealt with in Sartre's major work, Being and Nothingness. There, he tries to provide a phenomenological account of what happens to the world of self and how it is altered once the presence of another person is recognized.

Sartre, being not only a philosopher but also a novelist, uses fictional examples to illustrate and support his particular position on inter-subjectivity. One of them is called "The Look" and is more than convenient for it corresponds with our moments of observation in the novel.

The main characters in Sartre's example is the Self who is being observed and the observing other; in our case, as determined by the narrative mode, Abdu-Ibrahim as the Self and Julie as the other.

The crucial moment of "The Look" arrives precisely when we becomes conscious that someone else is looking while we are performing something into which we are wholly immersed and we do not want anyone to see us. In the process of becoming aware that somebody else is looking at us, we become an object of someone else's perception<sup>87</sup>. At the moment of this realization we are

overcome by shame (or pride), the state of which is being defined by Sartre as

*"the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the other is looking and judging"*<sup>88</sup>

Like the person totally devoted to the act of spying through a key hole, face to face with Julie's proposal Abdu-Ibrahim becomes wholly immersed in his anger, never before expressed in this manner. He shouts at Julie words implying rejection.<sup>89</sup> Even though she is there, her existence is not really taken into account. He speaks to her, yet he doesn't reflect on the actual meaning that his

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<sup>87</sup> Jonathan Webber. "The Look. Sartrean Existentialism". *Department of Philosophy*, University of Sheffield 2007. <<http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/04/12/25/TheLook.pdf>> (Jan 2, 2008)

<sup>88</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel Barnes. Washington Square Press 1966. pg 320

<sup>89</sup> Gordimer 95

words might signify to her. Only the anger exists in his non-reflective consciousness. When the emotion goes away and he again recognizes her existence and, in particular, her expression, there is something for him to realize.

*“He saw, could not stop himself seeing – everything change in her.”<sup>90</sup>*

He understands that she has been there, that she has been listening to his words and that she understood the rejection. The painful reaction to his implicit refusal which he recognizes in her face forces him to comprehend that he has been the object of her perception all along. There is an image of him in her consciousness that he cannot grasp. *She knows something of him* and what she knows is beyond his apprehension. Precisely, this realization is what Sartre calls shame or in other instances pride.

Why shame? For precisely shame (or pride), according to the French philosopher, is not only an emotion, it is a form of consciousness. It is one which is intentional, i.e. directed at an object (the person in question). As we gain this particular consciousness, as we become ashamed (or proud) we are conscious of ourselves as an object for someone else (e.g. the object of devotion). Our self is separated from us, it is suddenly beyond our grasp because at that moment it only exists for the other<sup>91</sup>. Therefore, before we arrive at any knowledge of ourselves, we are already the self which another knows (e.g. the object of devotion), yet we ourselves do not know it. We remain purely as a “reference” to the other.

*“ It is this irruption of the self which has been most often described: I see myself because somebody sees me – as it usually expressed. This way of putting it is not wholly exact ... I apprehend it as not being for me, since on principle it exists for the other ... I discover it in shame and, in other instances, in pride. It is shame or pride which reveals to me the other’s look and myself at the end of that look ... Shame reveals to me that I am this being, not in the mode of “was” or “having to be” but in-itself ... For the other I am seated as this inkwell is on the table; for the other, I am leaning over the keyhole as this tree is bent by the wind ... Shame - like pride - is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such.”<sup>92</sup>*

The problem is, however, that for the other person we are merely an object, the person looking is

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<sup>90</sup> Gordimer 96

<sup>91</sup> Jonathan Webber. “The Look. Sartrean Existentialism”. *Department of Philosophy*, University of Sheffield 2007. <<http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/04/12/25/TheLook.pdf>> (Jan 2, 2008)

<sup>92</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel Barnes. Washington Square Press 1966. pgs 284-6, 260-3

judging one to have a certain fixed nature. Naturally, it is not in one's control what kind of nature is ascribed to us – one cannot even know what it is.<sup>93</sup> It is the gaze of the other that for a moment defines the subject.

In spite of the fact that we do not know and cannot control what attributes we are assigned in the eyes of the other, the moments when we are conscious of being observed are moments that we consider fundamental to our self-knowledge. We somehow feel we are being “defined” and, as a consequence, we are often determined to decipher what “the look” actually means. The same applies to the characters in the novel. As if moments of mutual observation were a significant source of self understanding. It doesn't concern only the confrontations between Julie and Abdu-Ibrahim. Similarly, Julie realizes new aspects (i.e. the newness, unfamiliarity) about herself at the moment of the arrival; precisely when she encounters and examines the people of Abdu-Ibrahim's country and later his family.

*“Julie Summers. In the human press of the airport, in the eyes of the man made out with difficulty in his cave of a shop, in the faces turned in curiosity to study her, close by in the bus, it came to her that she was somehow as strange to herself as she was to them: she was what they saw.”*  
*“And it meant that when she went forward to his family in this state, with him, the son who belonged to them, she could do so offering herself in an emotional knowledge: if she was strangely new to them, she was also strangely new to herself.”<sup>94</sup>*

Moments like these seem to persuade the characters they are seeing themselves through the eyes of the others and it is through imagined and potential judgments (devotion, strangeness) that might be forced upon them they come to experience their momentary existence. However, based on Sartre's explication, we are inadequate to perceive the other's image of us and, we do not know what kind of nature is ascribed to us. Therefore, what we understand as the other's judgment must be by definition inaccurate. Unavoidably erroneous interpretations of what the world is like in the eyes of the other, wrong understanding of the other's statements and claims create imaginary judgments of the other as a specter that is never verbalized and clarified in the novel. This specter haunts the relationship between the two main characters from the very beginning. It functions as a barrier, silent and invisible wall that infinitely isolates the characters in their own world.

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<sup>93</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel Barnes. Washington Square Press 1966. pg 338

<sup>94</sup> Gordimer 117

*"She is ashamed of her parents; he thinks she is ashamed of him. Neither know either; about the other."*<sup>95</sup>

Abdu-Ibrahim, in particular, builds most of their perceptions of others and themselves precisely on these judgments. For instance, his self-image for the most part is closely related to the potential judgments he assumes Julie is making about him, about his country, his family, his people or even herself. He is literally obsessed with these assumptions, yet, in fact, they seem to have nothing to do with Julie as such. He creates the imaginary world of the other that is separated from the reality of the other. In the end, it is this fictitious reality which determines fundamentally his attitude towards Julie and that inevitably results in grave misunderstandings.

## **F. The dead sheep**

Again, it is a journey which comes to symbolize the fictitious world of the other. To be more precise, the symbol is not the journey itself but an obstacle that prevents the journey from taking place. As if they were tourists, Julie and Abdu-Ibrahim ride through the village in a borrowed car to tour the place. The description of what we see comes through Julie's eyes. It is a moderate description of what is expected in a village, the quiet atmosphere with men drinking coffee while Julie is observing the school, mosque, or communal hall. Everything is new and interesting. Then, however, to disturb the peacefulness of the description and as an omen of something sinister to come they become gradually lost to Abdu-Ibrahim's great dismay (getting lost in his own village?). We are introduced to the images of poverty.

*there was no demarcation between what was the thoroughfare and the shacks where goats were tethered and women squatted..."*<sup>96</sup>

Then, Julie is suddenly shocked and confused. There is a dead body of an animal in the middle of the road letting out its blood for the flies to feed themselves.

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<sup>95</sup> Gordimer 38

<sup>96</sup> Gordimer 132



“Dead sheep. Rotting.”<sup>97</sup>

Ibrahim becomes gravely disconcerted because of her reaction.

*He is ashamed and at the same time angrily resentful that she is seeing it (over again, he sees her), it will be an image of his country, his people, what he comes from, what he really is – like the name he has come back to be rightfully known by. Not for her; no, that was it.*<sup>98</sup>

Based on this extract, dead sheep is a symbol of all what Abdu-Ibrahim imagines that Julie sees, feels and thinks about him. He *imagines* it for it is particularly evident here that Abdu-Ibrahim perceives the event only via Julie's possible but unconfirmed point of view. The dead animal, therefore, becomes a symbol of Abdu-Ibrahim's self-deception related to his presumably valid assumptions of the thoughts and motivations of the other while, in fact, he is merely constructing fictitious world of the other in his self.

In more general terms, it becomes a symbol of all the potential judgments that are never materialized, never verbalized. It is a trap out which the relationship cannot free itself unless either of the characters communicates it to the other. That never occurs and therefore, the dead sheep signifies the silence; impossibility of communication. Perhaps, it can be avoided by an about-turn of the car. For a while. However, ultimately, the characters are trapped in it. Movement forward is prevented from taking place; alienation is an inseparable part of their relationship.

## G. Alienation

*“Thus in the shock which seizes me when I apprehend the other's look, this happens—that suddenly I experience a subtle alienation of all my possibilities, which are now associated with objects of the world, far from me in the midst of the world.”*<sup>99</sup>

Sartre is a pessimist in the sense that he considers alienation as present in any human relationship.

In Being and Nothingness it is described as an aspect of The Look related to the fact that one has no

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<sup>97</sup> Gordimer 133

<sup>98</sup> Gordimer 133

<sup>99</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel Barnes. Washington Square Press 1966. pg 256

control over which traits the other ascribes to one based on the part of behavior they have observed<sup>100</sup>. Based on this definition, the characters feel alienated for they are aware that the image projected on them by the other is by its definition not the one they have chosen yet they cannot prevent it from happening.

The first-person narrative mode, though scarcely used, reveals that they are both conscious of being ascribed attributes by the other that are unwanted and inappropriate.

*"He thinks I don't know. He doesn't know."*<sup>101</sup>

*"She is not for me, can't she realize that?"*<sup>102</sup>

Abdu-Ibrahim's feeling of alienation is palpable and is materialized by the anger at Julie's buying the tickets. He didn't choose to be the object of Julie's devotion. Without his being aware, she has chosen him. *Ubi tu Gaius, ego Gaia*. Yet she knows nothing. She obviously doesn't realize the whole complexity of his intentions.

Julie similarly cannot erase the image of a rich and whimsical girl in Abdu-Ibrahim's mind. These characteristics seem permanent. Whatever Julie does in the novel it may shock her husband or reveal to him that his understanding of her is deficient yet it doesn't change the essential picture of her as a privileged woman free to do whatever passes through her mind.

Being objectified by the other and objectifying the other reoccurs over and over again from the beginning of the pickup till its end. Even eventually, when the time comes for them to part the images of each other crash against each other once again; another of misjudgments is revealed.

Abdu-Ibrahim becomes shocked as soon as he finds out that Julie wishes to stay in the village. Yet, the old patterns sneak in. Even in the very end, Abdu-Ibrahim is trapped into his old habit of blaming Julie of naïveté and childishness, labeling and categorizing her in the old and known way<sup>103</sup>.

On the other hand, Julie is disappointed at how much he is blind towards her experience in the

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<sup>100</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel Barnes. Washington Square Press 1966. pg . 277

<sup>101</sup> Gordimer 230

<sup>102</sup> Gordimer 95

<sup>103</sup> Gordimer 262 -"her decision was a typical piece of sheltered middle-class Western romanticism. Like picking up a grease-monkey."

village.

*„I really thought you saw how I was beginning..... to live here.....I thought we were close enough for you to understand, even if it was something you didn't expect.....“<sup>104</sup>*

At the end of the novel, the characters are no less confused about the other than in the beginning and it is symptomatic that the novel ends with Abdu-Ibrahim's unsettling perplexity over who the other is.

*„Who is she? Who is she now, this woman who beckoned him to her, if ever a woman did ,who followed him to his place – bewilderment, rage“<sup>105</sup>*

Throughout the novel there is no mutual recognition, no understanding in communication. Each lover denies the other's freedom of a unique and complex human being and tries to possess the other stripping him or her of freedom, freedom of a subject. Love itself becomes rather a combat and genuine mutual recognition becomes impossible. In that sense The Pickup is eventually a rather sinister portrayal of impassable distance that exists between the self and the other, a distance that is even more painfully revealed and experienced in an intimate relationship of two people. What is left is only physical love;

*„the only unspoken knowledge they can share; that country to which they can resort.“<sup>106</sup>*

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<sup>104</sup> Gordimer 202

<sup>105</sup> Gordimer 249

<sup>106</sup> Gordimer 130

## V. The cultural other.

### A. Dichotomy. Mirroring.

The prison-like nature of the self that reaches out to grasp the other who (or which?) somehow always escapes, reappears in more ways than just as a fatal obstacle to the relationship of the two main characters. It naturally comes to define all aspects of the character's existence and is reflected also in the characters' bond with the milieu they momentarily occupy be it the physical landscape, things or human communities with their various sets of rules. Being thus reflected in the setting, plot and the inner microcosm of the characters themselves, the self/ other dichotomy exists not only as a problem to be conveyed by the novel but also runs through the text as an essential principle of the novel's framework.

It is not a mere accident that there are two main characters and two distinctive environments. Each character, in turn, becomes the other in relation to a strange and foreign cultural milieu. Each of the two settings represents a compact, rounded-off half to complete the binary nature of the text. A highly urbanized, developed, multicultural and well-known Johannesburg opposed to the small, insignificant village in the middle of a desert which doesn't even have a name in the novel. Why a name? It is only one of many. In this manner, the two settings, the exclusive center space and the margin territory, stand in sharp opposition and contrast, home for one is exile for the other.

The turn, again, is realized as a journey; an airplane flight. Journey that unlike others in the novel is implicit and not represented as action. It is anticipated by the gesture, implied by the poem (*"Let us go to another country. Just say the word. The rest is understood."*) and claimed by an announcement (*"Ibrahim ibn Musa"*) that notifies us of new identities, transformation of a character. It is an almost cinematographic cut that makes possible the shift of location. There are no lengthy descriptions of the actual travel and the change is abrupt and immediate. The nature of the air-plane flight itself is thus defined; traveling where the actual experience of traveling, i.e. the

gradual change of environment, is absent. There is no time for adjustment.

Naturally, the radical change of the setting and the consequent contra-position of the two territories enhance, if not create, the contrast between aspects in characters' behavior. Action of one is a mere mirror image of the other who has to deal with a similar situation in the other environment. The first time we come to notice this mirroring of the novel is already at the airport, entering the other territory. We notice the sudden sense of confidence felt in Abdu-Ibrahim due to the simple truth of understanding and being understood. He becomes aware of his own efficiency, familiar with all the possible obstacles of their journey. Another sign that *Abdu*, the cultural other with the first name only, the *nobody*, *greasy monkey under a car* now becomes *Ibrahim Ibn Musa*: the son, brother, brother-in-law, nephew, the male of the household. The man who is *somebody* of whom much is expected and much that must be forgiven and endured.

*"He was shouting at his sister.....and the gentle girl was swaying this way and that as if she were being slapped....'He has many worry-he is too busy with hard things. I know that. It is not me.'"*<sup>107</sup>

Julie, on the contrary, loses the effectiveness, the practicality formerly employed in their effort to grant Abdu-Ibrahim the permission to stay in South Africa. Finding herself in a new territory, she feels lost. She undergoes initial confusion for *"she has no sense of who she is"*<sup>108</sup> to become *"strangely new to herself"*<sup>109</sup> and thinks of the place with *"an intrigued detachment"*<sup>110</sup>. The roles are exchanged. At the very moment each of the characters comes to occupy the position formerly taken by the other.

## **B. Contrapuntal awareness**

The reality of being foreign, an outsider in relation to a certain culture is demonstrated in the novel by a set of features that characterize Julie's and Abdu-Ibrahim's experience in a different

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<sup>107</sup> Gordimer 163

<sup>108</sup> Gordimer 110

<sup>109</sup> Gordimer 117

<sup>110</sup> Gordimer 117

milieu by the way they are perceived by other people. It often concerns aspects of behavior others find wearisome, silly or even offensive. It is inevitably interrelated with the language barrier and obstacles in interaction in general.

For instance, when Julie moves to a new environment, she ceases to be perceived with the authority of (white, privileged) “class” that demands reverence, she is no longer treated in the strangely respectful manner in which The Table, Motsamai or Abdu-Ibrahim's employer behaved towards her. Her dominant feature, at least during the initial stage of her stay, is her foreignness; for others she becomes primarily, Abdu-Ibrahim's foreign wife (“*this foreign woman*”<sup>111</sup>). The privilege of her class and financial security lurking behind her back is not so evident in the village environment.

*At least she had some money because she was one of those not for him. But how much that would compensate them, reach them, his family, was doubtful because she had the luxury, of those who have always had everything, to pride herself in not taking money from her rich father even if he were to offer it. ...She'll have enough to pay for her food and mine, while she's here. That's what I, their son, bring back to provide for their old age, for my sisters and their children's future...*<sup>112</sup>

Furthermore, her beginnings in the new country are defined by striking naivety and ignorance.

When she arrives, she behaves and appears like an unknowing tourist or at least she is certainly described as one.

*“-her the tourist who like all tourists didn't ever know what it was really she was looking at”*<sup>113</sup>

Her decisiveness and stubbornness so effective and somehow likable in the old environment must be perceived as boldness and arrogance in the traditional milieu. Uncovered woman in a place where women are veiled (“*it is enough for these people, that she goes about with an uncovered head-that they can tolerate with a white face maybe*”<sup>114</sup>), insisting on her independence where women do not have any (*Of course. Independent. This is the way she's accustomed to living, pleasing herself.*<sup>115</sup>) and who is carefree enough to transgress religious rules<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>111</sup> Gordimer 161

<sup>112</sup> Gordimer 114

<sup>113</sup> Gordimer 137

<sup>114</sup> Gordimer 123

<sup>115</sup> Gordimer 122

She appears ridiculous to Abdu-Ibrahim when she starts to look for bathroom in a place where there aren't any<sup>117</sup>. For him, she becomes a burden for things must be explained to her. She becomes the cultural other.

She loses her language; the connection to others. She who made living by communication (as a fund-raiser and PRO); who happily chatters with her friends of The Table and who is in charge of all the interviews supposed to grant Abdu-Ibrahim home in her own country suddenly doesn't understand the language spoken by others and is unable to speak with anyone but Abdu-Ibrahim and his sister Maryam.

The conversations that take place between the girl and Julie play crucial role in Julie's adjustment to the new milieu, for it is by conversing with Maryam she "picks up" Arabic and starts communicating. Yet they develop only gradually, the initial dialogue being only an absurd small talk with words that do not produce any understanding, quite on the contrary. One is using phrases the literal meaning of which is understood by the other, yet that is insufficient for actual apprehension of what the other means. The issue here is not primarily one's poor knowledge of the other's language. The problem is that Julie and Maryam are strikingly unfamiliar with the cultural background the other comes from so that, inevitably, they are confused about what the words actually imply.

*'How was the journey.'*

*'The journey was fine, but you know it is very far-where Ibrahim and I came from.'*

*'We know. He sent us a letter. Some day it came. I hope you will like it here. It is a village only.'*

*'I hope you will show me your village.'*

*'Ibrahim will show.'*

*The two young women looked at one another in deep incomprehensibility, each unable to imagine the life of the other, smiling.<sup>118</sup>*

The misunderstanding is especially tied to two irritating details in the conversation, each reveals ignorance of at least one participant. First, it is the strange emphasis on *Ibrahim* created by the replacement of the pronoun with the man's name.

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<sup>116</sup> Gordimer 155-156

<sup>117</sup> Gordimer 122

<sup>118</sup> Gordimer 121, also "foreign newcomer" - Gordimer 121, "my foreign wife" - Gordimer 232, "the foreign wife he brought to them" - Gordimer 254

*'I hope you will show me your village.'*  
*'Ibrahim will show.'*

The strange tension hidden in the act of insertion of the name signifies the woman's reluctance to commit herself to any activity proposed by Julie suggests, to participate in (or even to direct or guide) an independent activity behind the man's back. The girl's reply indicates that the village in the desert is a realm of different set of rules that privilege men rather than women. Men control and are in charge of women's activities and initiatives. At least on the surface. Julie, who is reluctant to put on a scarf (doesn't she know that she is in a Muslim country?) and is ready to explore the village on her own, naturally, cannot comprehend.

Secondly, Maryam's affirmative response to Julie's comment on the journey is similarly awkward.

*'The journey was fine, but you know it is very far-where Ibrahim and I came from.'*  
*'We know. He sent us a letter. Some day it came. '*

The image of loud and urbanized Johannesburg fresh in her memory and the reality of the small village in the desert do not probably bear comparison. That is what one reads between the lines of "...it is very far-where Ibrahim and I came from.'" How could the girl who has never been further than few kilometers outside of the village where she was born and has lived all her life understand? The paradoxical claim that "*we know*" only creates a sense how completely unimaginable is the other world for her.

The latter exchange reveals that there is yet something else that creates distance between the two participants of the conversation. This particular misunderstanding takes place because one is aware of reality that has never been experienced by the other. In many other cases the discord takes place precisely due to this type of imbalance between the locals (The Table, Maryam) on the one hand and Julie or Abdu-Ibrahim on the other. The experience of two radically different environments seems to make a great difference between theirs and others' perspective. This particular knowledge develops into what Edward Said coins "*contrapuntal awareness*", a benefit (or loss?) that is gained by those who have moved from their primary place, to a new location from



which the self and its others, are seen in a different light.

*Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that--to borrow a phrase from music--is contrapuntal. For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environment are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally.*<sup>119</sup>

The simultaneous existence of the two worlds in Abdu-Ibrahim's mind is portrayed in the first half of the novel as his absent-mindedness, the fact that he is always lost in his own thoughts, somehow distanced from the immediate reality, elsewhere. Passive, rather than active character, observer rather than the one who acts. His background transforms into „*hidden life*“<sup>120</sup> that is from time to time translated into brief remarks and disquieting comments be it on The Table or Nigel Ackroyd Summers' circle (“*Interesting people there. They make a success.*”<sup>121</sup>). Julie is disturbed by his remarks. The Table laughs at his conclusions<sup>122</sup>. We should not wonder, contrapuntal awareness resists communication to those who are “*principally aware of one culture*”<sup>123</sup>. Abdu-Ibrahim cannot communicate his exile awareness to the Table or the Julie of Johannesburg. A sense of remoteness and distance is an inseparable part of the exile consciousness.

Coming back to being *somebody* in the village doesn't change much. The feeling of isolation remains. Since Abdu-Ibrahim has experienced the overwhelming freedom of a fatherless industrial city, the demands and expectations of the local people come to represent disturbing limitations of that freedom, a threat of falling into a pitfall of the others' image of him. His relatives do not understand. On the contrary, their own wishes imposed Abdu-Ibrahim are perceived as something undoubtedly helpful and good. When Abdu-Ibrahim's uncle comes to express his wish for him to inherit the business, it is considered a blessing.

*Ibrahim will inherit the business, and live in a house with fine carpets and furniture.....That is Ibrahim's blessed future. Al Hamdu Lillah. Praise be to God.*<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Edward Said. „Reflections on Exile“. *Reflections on Exile and other Essays*. Harvard University Press 2000. pg 186

<sup>120</sup> Gordimer 25

<sup>121</sup> Gordimer 51

<sup>122</sup> Gordimer 21

<sup>123</sup> Edward Said. „Reflections on Exile“. *Reflections on Exile and other Essays*. Harvard University Press 2000. pg 186

<sup>124</sup> Gordimer 185

As a consequence, the place is doomed as far as he is concerned (*"the cursed village in the sand, his home that claimed him"*<sup>125</sup>); there is little space for what he himself desires, only the great burden of claims by those who put their faith in him. It is a mouse trap to deprive Abdu-Ibrahim's of his own ambitions, one that must be carefully avoided should his dreams ever realize.

Place that means stagnation and obstacle for one, becomes space of peace and contentment for the other that is another contrast highlighted by the settings' dichotomy. Home and what is familiar is what one rejects and exile is what one eventually welcomes, what one desires. Abdu-Ibrahim's admiration for the circle at Nigel Ackroyd Summer, the world of commerce and privilege is mirrored in Julie's infatuation with the new milieu where she gradually realizes she's found the real intimacy, stability, home. Gradually adapting herself to the new cultural environment, new pattern of life, she soon loses her initial appearance and behavior of an ignorant tourist. She willingly starves along with others during Ramadan, she attends to household duties reserved traditionally for women, she reads Koran. Most importantly, she *"picks up"* the language in a "language exchange" sessions with the other women so that her old weapon is soon back in her hands.

*In the family house Maryam has gathered her sister Amina, who has just given birth, and Khadija, wife of the son missing at the oil fields; they and others come unobtrusively to join the exchange, picking up Julie's language, Julie picking up theirs,...*<sup>126</sup>

For someone who has never experienced real concern in the fatherless environment of a family full of upper class falsity and absence of genuine affection, restrictions and demands claimed by others in the more traditional society of the village seem well-founded and just. For Julie they represent and grant security and care.

*Since we've been home here. You must understand, I've never lived in a family before, just made substitutes out of other people, ties, I suppose-though I didn't realize that, either, then. There are.....things.....between people here, that are important, no, necessary to them.....*

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<sup>125</sup> Gordimer 141

<sup>126</sup> Gordimer 150

Home for one is an exile for the other. The common experience of exile does not bring them closer to each other; both react differently, in exactly the opposite way, to either environment. Abdu admires what Julie hates. Julie feels at ease where Ibrahim senses a trap. Either does not comprehend the other's motives for his/her journey.

*All the pain of seeing him return to the same new-old humiliations that await him, doing the dirty work they don't want to do for themselves....the chance of being the Oriental Prince<sup>127</sup>.*

*She will be in this house, this family, this village, this place in the desert...without him, without anyone to talk to who, as he does, knows her world....<sup>128</sup>*

Ironically, they make the same decision. Both reject the place they have been “assigned”, both make a choice, both “pick up” different culture and commit themselves to being an outsider; the cultural other, the exile. The contrapuntal awareness is perhaps the only thing shared. The binary character of knowledge that brings a glimpse of understanding.

*But what is the confusion? No confusion; I should know that. Like me, like me, she won't go back where she belongs. She looks for somewhere else.<sup>129</sup>*

### **C. “You have no choose -choice or you have choice. Only two kinds. Of people.”**

There is another opposition regarding to the relationship of Julie and Abdu-Ibrahim that is related to their outsider status of being a stranger. They are both foreigners, yet the very nature of their being foreign; the other in a strange environment vastly differs.

There are many strategies how to conceptualize and categorize the phenomenon of ‘homelessness’; Edward Said, for example, differentiates among exiles, refugees, expatriates and émigrés. Exiles and refugees are literally forced to live in a different country due to circumstances that they could not avoid. For expatriates and émigrés exile is always more or less a matter of choice.<sup>130</sup> Winifred Woodhull, on the other hand, sees the difference elsewhere. She discriminates

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<sup>127</sup> Gordimer 266

<sup>128</sup> Gordimer 266

<sup>129</sup> Gordimer 262

<sup>130</sup> Edward Said. „Reflections on Exile“. *Reflections on Exile and other Essays*. Harvard University Press 2000. pg 181

between exiles-intellectuals and the masses of uneducated immigrants-refugees - "*the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created, or refugees without urbanity, with only ration cards and agency numbers.*"<sup>131</sup> While both groups inevitably face adaptation problems émigrés and expatriates still have something to offer to the society they enter even though it may be not appreciated or it is neglected. The masses of immigrants, on the other hand, unquestionably suffer from more serious political, cultural and social marginality which makes the integration into the host society a totally different matter<sup>132</sup>.

While as far the former classification is concerned, the matter is one of choice, in the latter it is the cultural and economic potential of those who are migrating. Choice is an issue in *The Pickup* the importance of which is already signified by the title or the motto of the novel. "*Let us go to another country.*" *Choose* to become an exile, *choose* to leave your home. However, under what conditions? It is the circumstances of the *pick* that make the difference.

Julie enjoys variety of numerous possibilities, there are no obstacles to prevent her movement, her journeys. She can choose to go anywhere she wishes, she can *pick* any location she likes. Isn't it ironic that of all places she chooses to go somewhere no one is willing to travel? Her decision is considered odd by both, her family and The Table. Her act is provocative and unexpected. Her status and action make her exceptional and unique; one of a kind in both communities, the one in Johannesburg and in the village. She seems to be well-liked and popular wherever she goes. Even in the village she quickly recovers her confidence, she learns Arabic, adapts herself. She finds her voice again. She speaks.

Abdu-Ibrahim is just one of hundreds of thousands of poor immigrants who are streaming into the Western world to find better living, either for economical or political reasons. Being one of many, the unwanted one, he is completely immobile. The more he is denied movement, the greater is his desire to move. Back home, he is a dispensable body; in Johannesburg, his abjection

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<sup>131</sup> Said in Winifred Woodhull. "Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations, and Nomadisms." *Yale French Studies*, No. 82., Volume 1. (1993), pg. 7

<sup>132</sup> Winifred Woodhull. "Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations, and Nomadisms." *Yale French Studies*, No. 82., Volume 1. (1993), pg. 7

manifests itself through the notion that the social structures he enters relegate him to the position of unwanted, alien, and insignificant invader. He is reminded of that position whenever he goes. Being detached, listening rather than speaking that is his response, his manner of communication in that other world.

#### D. At The Table

The notion of language and, more specifically, having a voice becomes an issue at The Table who feel uneasy about Abdu-Ibrahim's reserved manners. His aloofness (*"He was listening, or was not listening at all; absent in his own thoughts"*<sup>133</sup>), on the one hand and The Table's disdainful remarks (*"The Pickup of hers' s been a disaster from the beginning.- Come on, he's not a bad guy, he just needed a meal ticket. A bed. And he obviously knew how to occupy it."*<sup>134</sup>) on the other, indicate that there is a tension and mutual antipathy that exists between him and The Table, obstacle in communication that is palpable but never explicitly claimed.

When Julie brings Abdu-Ibrahim for the first time her friends appear welcoming, open and full of understanding for strangers like him. Their proclaimed nonconformity and open-mindedness lead one to assume that such approach is quite natural and genuine on their part. Yet somewhere behind the concern they display there is a waspish touch of insincerity. The Table acts *as if* they actually took interest in the man. Later we are told that his actual worth lies primarily in being an exciting topic to break up the stereotype and boredom of The Table's sessions;

*.. they knew each other too well, perhaps, and he was an element like a change in climate coming out of season, the waft of an unfamiliar temperature.*<sup>135</sup>

They act as if he was their equal (*"he is not a 'garage man' he's a friend, one of them"*<sup>136</sup>), not a *greasy monkey, a nobody*. Nevertheless, both sides are very well aware that this is not the case. *"But*

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<sup>133</sup> Gordimer 35

<sup>134</sup> Gordimer 92

<sup>135</sup> Gordimer 20

<sup>136</sup> Gordimer 14

*not at the cafe,*"<sup>137</sup> says Abdu-Ibrahim's to express his resentment toward The Table soon after being acquainted with it. He leaves The Table's discussions with a sense of non-belonging "*he's a mechanic, he belongs to the manual world of work.*"<sup>138</sup> The Table, too, evidently remains highly suspicious of him and there is a sense of mastery power in phrases such as "*he just needed a meal ticket*" or "*where did Julie pick him up?*"<sup>139</sup>.

To behave *as if* - a kind of bold hypocrisy of seeming openness and ease that hides disdain and suspicion. Behavior that is, according to Gordimer, *just the reverse side of bourgeois xenophobia.*"<sup>140</sup> Indeed, there is not much difference between the two-faced open-mindedness displayed by The Table and the strictly polite and formal falsity exhibited by Nigel Ackroyd Summers and his wife.

At The Table verbal communication is what defines the community. Friends forever discuss this and that matter, give opinions, and have political debates. When Abdu-Ibrahim comes for the first time, they are not shy to ask instantly straightforward questions (even bizarre ones, e.g. "*Are you a buddhist?*"<sup>141</sup>) so that after few moments they seem to know everything about him or the place he comes from.

*So that's where he's from; one of them knows all about the benighted country. The 'garage man' has a university degree in economics there.... but there isn't hope in hell (and that place is a hell that, because of god knows what probably the religious and political factions he did or did not belong to, or lack of money to pay bribes to the right people)*<sup>142</sup>

They don't hesitate to give various judgments, offer advice on his position of an illegal immigrant. At the same time, they do not appear to be genuinely interested whether this type of information or advice is actually desired by Abdu-Ibrahim. Their lack of concern related to Abdu-Ibrahim's true needs and the arrogance with which "*They're telling him about his country*"<sup>143</sup> suggests to us that he is by no means an equal partner in the discussions. The Table manages to turn him into a mere

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<sup>137</sup> Gordimer 17

<sup>138</sup> Gordimer 15

<sup>139</sup> Gordimer 22

<sup>140</sup> Gordimer 14

<sup>141</sup> Gordimer 14

<sup>142</sup> Gordimer 14

<sup>143</sup> Gordimer 14

object, topic, while he is not, in fact, invited to take part in it.

The situation at The Table becomes disturbingly unbalanced at this point. The crowd of Julie's friends is clearly in charge of the conversations, defining their own role (the interviewers and debaters) in it as well as Abdu-Ibrahim's (the one debated and interviewed). The latter talks rarely and only "*to satisfy their curiosity*"<sup>144</sup>, otherwise remains quiet; voiceless, absent as subject. He remains unavailable as an active participant in the discourse which concerns him and yet doesn't. He becomes a mere fiction – "*that oriental prince*"<sup>145</sup> constructed by The Table's questions which do not wait to be answered. At this point we become concerned over the possibility of the character's self-representation, i.e. in what ways (if at all) Abdu-Ibrahim resists and challenges the invading discourse of The Table.

### E. Speaking for the other

The section in question represents but a moment in the narrative, nevertheless, a moment particularly troublesome. The reason is not only the unequal relations among the characters in the novel. It becomes disturbing precisely because it implies something unsettling about the whole text itself. The scene at The Table involving Abdu-Ibrahim as the cultural other may be considered as a small-scale model for a problem that involves the novel as such and its general relationship toward cultural otherness. It brings our attention to the problematic position of Nadine Gordimer herself regarding the representation of the cultural (or social) other.

We cannot but admit that in the context of post-colonial theory Abdu ( *the nobody*) typifies the ultimate victim of unequal distribution of wealth and power in the world as we now know it. Throughout modern history, many have attempted to verbalize the perspective of the oppressed as Ania Loomba proves when she traces Marxist, Feminist and post-structuralist attempts. The main issue in her analysis becomes, however, whether or not the perspective of the colonized can be at all

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<sup>144</sup> Gordimer 23

<sup>145</sup> Gordimer 36

represented by these systems of thought<sup>146</sup>. In this context, we must ask fundamental questions in relation to the novel and its author. What is Gordimer's position as an intellectual relating to us the story of Abdu-Ibrahim, the oppressed and downtrodden? Is she revealing the difficulties and problems faced every day by masses of illegal immigrants streaming into the developed world? Is she representing their perspective by giving us an insight into the world of one of them? What is our situation as readers? Are we not, both, the writer and us, like *The Table*, similarly essentializing, "Telling him about his country"?

According to Loomba, one of the most influential works regarding the post-colonial subject and the issues of representation is an essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak<sup>147</sup>, the term "subaltern" being defined by Spivak as:

*the bottom layers of society constituted by specific modes of exclusion from markets, political-legal representation, and the possibility of full membership in dominant social strata.*<sup>148</sup>

One of Spivak's aims in the essay is to critique attempts to rewrite Indian colonial history from a subaltern perspective. For instance, she writes:

*'The task of research' (i.e. defining the subaltern) projected here is 'to investigate, identify and measure the specific nature and degree of the deviation of (the) elements (constituting item 3) from the ideal and situate it historically.' 'Investigate, identify and measure the specific': a program could hardly be more essentialist and taxonomic. Yet a curious methodological imperative is at work.*<sup>149</sup>

As a consequence, Spivak asserts there is almost no evidence related to the actual presence of the subaltern within elite, colonial documents. What remains is merely appropriation because to know the subaltern, know its position and represent that consciousness necessarily means its existence within a discourse, which is, in the end, always in the hands of the elite and their ideologies. In case of the particular case in India, it is the nativist, on the one hand, and official accounts, on the other. It is in this sense that the subaltern cannot speak, according to Spivak, because representations of

<sup>146</sup> Ania Loomba. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. Routledge 2005. pg 193.

<sup>147</sup> Ania Loomba. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. Routledge 2005. pg 159

<sup>148</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Foreword: Upon Reading the *Companion to Postcolonial Studies*." *Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Ed by Henry Schwarz, Sangeeta Ray. Blackwell Publishing 2000. pg xx

<sup>149</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?". *The Post-colonial Reader*. Ed by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. Routledge 1995. pg. 27



the subaltern are never in his/her control.

The word representation appears of fundamental significance for Spivak while being relevant to our research as well. In her essay, Spivak distinguishes between two types or senses of representation.

*Two senses of representation are being run together; representation as 'speaking for' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy.<sup>150</sup>*

The first step to avoid appropriation of the subaltern is to realize precisely this particular distinction between the double senses of representation. Her use of the terms owes a debt to Karl Marx who, as he was writing in German, was aware of the distinction. Spivak, herself, explains in an interview:

*First, about Vertretung, stepping in someone's place, really. Tritt (from treten, the second half of vertretung) has the English cognate tread. So that it might make it easier to look at this word as a word. Vertretung, to tread in someone's shoes, represents that way. Your congressional person.....actually puts on your shoes when he or she represents you. Treading in your shoes, wearing your shoes, that's Vertretung. Representation in that sense: political representation. Darstellung – Dar, “there”, same cognate. Stellen, is to place, so 'placing there'. Representing: 'proxy' and 'portrait'.....Now, the thing to remember is that in the act of representing politically, you actually represent yourself and your constituency in the portrait sense as well. So that you do not ever 'simply' vertreten anyone...<sup>151</sup>*

There is not *Vertretung* without *Darstellung* yet it remains fatal to be aware of the difference. The confusion of the two senses inevitably results in a fatal mistake; i.e. assumption that the always imagined body politic (the represented subaltern) has its literal referents (the illegal immigrant from a poor country). To represent always hides a moment of fiction, the fact of homogenizing the difference, creating the imaginary. Representation itself, as Spivak understands it, seems always insufficient.

While we who possess a voice can challenge representation, the subaltern cannot for he/she cannot speak and is not heard. A project to represent her/him must always end as fiction for the subaltern subject is by its definition unrepresentable. The project of the intellectual then seems giving up on the representation of the subaltern consciousness for he/she cannot possess the

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<sup>150</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. *The Post-colonial Reader*. Ed by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. Routledge 1995. pg. 30

<sup>151</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. “Practical politics of the open end”. *Deconstruction: A Reader*. Ed by Martin McQuillan. Routledge 2001. pg 401.

knowledge of it.

*“The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss. In this they are a paradigm of the intellectuals.”*<sup>152</sup>

## **F. The tension of representation**

Spivak's analyses raises fundamental questions and doubts regarding Abdu-Ibrahim, his presence at The Table and in the novel in general, and even the representation of other characters, such as members of Abdu-Ibrahim's family. Considering, however, that it is mainly Abdu-Ibrahim in the first half of the novel who is presented as an oppressed subject, one of the voiceless mass, *nobody*, it is mainly him who is going to be the object of our attention. In addition, the first person narrative together with the third person narrative that is often tainted by Abdu-Ibrahim's perspective via focalization making him more accessible than, for example, his vaguely depicted mother. It is also mainly his portrayal that is most likely to open the novel to criticisms of "speaking for," essentializing; the very danger that Spivak warns us against.

For The Table Abdu-Ibrahim is a true subaltern. The discourse of The Table denies him space to speak for himself. He is not heard - his remarks are not taken seriously (the laughter), he does not speak - his silence remains inaccessible. For us, the readers, however, the situation is far different. To us Abdu-Ibrahim appears less defenseless. His silence is not silence of a victim, it is silence that speaks; a sign of defiance. First, there are his remarks that are never heard by The Table, in fact, we are sometimes not even certain whether they are actually uttered out loud.

*People are disgusting, in that place*<sup>153</sup>

*Dumb. Might as well be. When they are talking about matters you know better than they do or ever will.*<sup>154</sup>

*Why do you choose those friends instead of your family*<sup>155</sup>

Secondly, it is due to the fact that we are given context, a point of view because of the narrative

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<sup>152</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?". *The Post-colonial Reader*. Ed by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. Routledge 1995. pg. 28

<sup>153</sup> Gordimer 22

<sup>154</sup> Gordimer 90

<sup>155</sup> Gordimer 62

mode that clarifies his behavior at The Table and fills up silence with meanings. Thus, it seems to change the distribution of power between The Table and Abdu-Ibrahim in our understanding.

*There is not much he can tell other than they drew from him with their brotherly welcoming when she introduced him to The Table months ago; or that he chooses to tell them?....-what is he seeking in this phalanstery of wine- and coffee-bibbers? 156*

In the end, as far as we are concerned, Abdu-Ibrahim seems to be given space and voice to represent himself. We hear him express himself, and, therefore, as Donna Landry explains, he apparently ceases to be the ultimate subaltern<sup>157</sup>.

Once we move beyond the narrative situation, the perspective changes once again, at the same time, becoming more complex. There are suddenly two, somehow, conflicting aspects that are present in the narrative mode and, in fact, in the general form of the novel, creating tension. First it is the representation of Abdu-Ibrahim as performed by the novelist that resembles on a larger scale the appropriation by The Table. Even though it might look like Abdu-Ibrahim is granted a voice, there is a notion of something false in it. Once we become aware of the authorial narrative voice, his self-representation ceases to be self-representation but becomes an appropriation on the part of the novelist. The other's voice becomes subaltern's silence being represented by the intellectual. The voice of the oppressed is absent and Abdu-Ibrahim becomes merely the writer's imaginary other. This awareness emerges whenever we dive into the character's mind, i.e. whenever the narrative mode changes into the first person narrative or we come to view the situation via Abdu-Ibrahim's point of view. The distance collapses and we can see and understand the other, we can "*investigate, identify and measure*" the other but only to essentialize and deny the difference of reality we cannot understand.

At the same time, we cannot remain blind to Gordimer's very flexible narrative technique (i.e. moving from authorial to focal narration and vice versa) that often makes it difficult to detect

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<sup>156</sup> Gordimer 59

<sup>157</sup> Donna Landry. "Reading Spivak". *The Spivak Reader. Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. Routledge 1996. pgs 5-6. - "*when she claims that the subaltern "cannot speak," she means that the subaltern as such cannot be heard by the privileged of either the First or Third Worlds. If the subaltern were able to make herself heard – as has happened when particular subaltern have emerged, in Antonio Gramsci's terms, as organic intellectuals and spokespeople for their communities – her status as a subaltern would be changed utterly; she would cease to be subaltern.*"

whose point of view we are really actually perceiving. The most evident scene is when the couple arrives into Abdu-Ibrahim's country and we are given lengthy descriptions of the place, impressions but of whom?:

*Two old women squatting, wide-kneed, skirts occupied by the to-and-fro of children, the black-veiled women gazing, jostling, the mouth masticating food, the big bellies of men pregnant with age under white tunics, the tangling patterns of human speech, laughter, exasperation, argument, the clumps of baggage, residue of lives, sum of lives (which?), in a common existence-that-does-not-exist. Julie is no different.....*<sup>158</sup>

However, is it authorial narration? Are we given Julie's perspective? Abdu-Ibrahim's? Is it the omniscient narrator (objective) or the subjective one?

Perhaps now it is the right moment to comment on the strange ambivalence as far as the form is concerned. It becomes apparent that the novel is unique (or perhaps unsettling) in not being written either in entirely realist or experimental mode, attempting at representation while disturbing its own representational mode of writing. To analyze this aspect in more detail it is necessary to elaborate on what these terms actually signify.

Plato initiates the discussion on representation when he lets Socrates suggest in The Republic that a painting is a representation as long as it attempts to reproduce the appearance or image of an object. The key characteristic of representation is then resemblance<sup>159</sup>. Realism in aesthetics emphasizes “objective representation”, i.e. how much (objectively) true information can be derived from the work of art about what it depicts<sup>160</sup>. If the intention of an artist is to be successful the experience of an art work must *resemble* that of its object.

In The Pickup “objective representation” takes place as attempts to depict larger historical and social context (e.g. transitional state of South African society) thus portraying in Georg Lukács' words „*the dialectic between the individual's subjectivity and objective reality*”<sup>161</sup>. The text's

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<sup>158</sup> Gordimer 112

<sup>159</sup> Alan Goldman. “Representation”. *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. Oxford University Press 1994. Vol 4, pg. 137.

<sup>160</sup> Jonathan Gilmore. “Pictorial Realism”. *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. Oxford University Press 1994. Vol 4, pgs 109-110.

<sup>161</sup> Georg Lukács. “The Ideology of Modernism”. *Literature in the Modern World. Critical Essays and Documents*. Ed by Dennis Walder. Oxford University Press 2004. pg 178

linear<sup>162</sup> (“aborescent”), i.e. selective, structure, and, omniscient er-form narrative mode further classify the text as belonging to the realist tradition<sup>163</sup>.

The modernist tradition is, on the other hand, characterized by “*rejection of narrative objectivity..(and)...surrender to subjectivity*”<sup>164</sup>. Such tendency is discernible in the novel, in various moments we become aware that the novel is apparently stepping forward for formal experiment. It is precisely when we are in doubt related to who is speaking, whose perspective we are being offered. It is when we are denied enough information to comprehend the characters' intentions. Most importantly, the streams of consciousness, though clarifying to some extent what the characters did and why, reveal precisely the relative, unreliable, and ambiguous nature of the world that is presented to us. Our knowledge of it becomes suspect.

The question than must be asked in the following manner. Whether and how does this ultimate “*attenuation of reality*”<sup>165</sup> modify our belief in Gordimer's appropriation of the subaltern?

It seems as a paradox. Streams of consciousness that signify “I” for the other, that represent that other, disclose, according to Lukács, unreliability of the world around and, therefore a disintegration of the subject/personality as these two are closely interrelated.<sup>166</sup> *The man is inexplicable to other as he is to himself*<sup>167</sup> says the voice that “represents” unrepresentable (Abdu-Ibrahim). Appropriating the other while at the same time challenging the very reality of that appropriation. That is the tension, “curious contradiction”, another “complexity”.

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<sup>162</sup> Wendell V. Harris. “Modernism”. *Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory*. Greenwood Press 1992. pg. 239

<sup>163</sup> Wendell V. Harris. “Modernism”. *Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory*. Greenwood Press 1992. pg. 324-328

<sup>164</sup> Georg Lukács. “The Ideology of Modernism”. *Literature in the Modern World. Critical Essays and Documents*. Ed by Dennis Walder. Oxford University Press 2004. pg 178

<sup>165</sup> Georg Lukács. “The Ideology of Modernism”. *Literature in the Modern World. Critical Essays and Documents*. Ed by Dennis Walder. Oxford University Press 2004. pg 180

<sup>166</sup> Georg Lukács. “The Ideology of Modernism”. *Literature in the Modern World. Critical Essays and Documents*. Ed by Dennis Walder. Oxford University Press 2004. pg 178

<sup>167</sup> Georg Lukács. “The Ideology of Modernism”. *Literature in the Modern World. Critical Essays and Documents*. Ed by Dennis Walder. Oxford University Press 2004. pg 180

## VI. What the novel does not say.

### A. Julie's silence

Abdu-Ibrahim is silent, does not speak and is not heard but the silence in the text belongs to Julie as well. At the end of the story we are equally uncertain about her intentions, desires, the seriousness of her decisions, the nature of her actions. Is she ready to give up on Abdu-Ibrahim? Has she only found another, perhaps less possessive way of loving him? Has she found her “home”? Does she truly care for Maryam, Khadija and all the others? Do they not represent just another element in the series of Julie's pickups? Likewise we do not know and understand the essential motives. For instance, the major stimulus for Julie's decision to stay in the village seems to take place in the desert yet what actually happens there is mostly depicted in a very abstract and vague manner.

*-I don't know, out of the sky something has changed your mind, driven you crazy? Where did you get the idea from, how, where?  
And while his anguish batters them both she now knows where. The desert. But she cannot tell him that. The stump of wall in the sands where the street ends, The dog waits and a child places a hand.<sup>168</sup>*

We learn, however, that it is there, at the very end of the story, Julie learns something important about herself and Abdu-Ibrahim. At some point, she comes to realize that Abdu-Ibrahim, the one she has chosen to follow; is rather her self-projection, an image of her own desires more than somebody real, an independent consciousness.

*...for her to understand what she had done. 'I was occupied in picturing him to myself; I had undertaken the task of imagining him.' But he is himself. Nobody's task. Tell it to the desert; that is safe.<sup>169</sup>*

However, is that the reason that actually pushes Julie to stay in the village?

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<sup>168</sup> Gordimer 262

<sup>169</sup> Gordimer 245

## B. Journeys to the desert

The confrontation with the desert takes place as a series of repeated journeys, probably the most puzzling ones of all in the novel. Isn't it ironic? The plane flight that brought the characters from one world (industrial, diverse and cosmopolitan) to another (poor, religious and conservative) was given so little space in the narrative. The journey to the desert, perhaps a five-minute walk not one of the other characters know about (*No-one would notice her absence*<sup>170</sup>), is described in much detail. We learn about the buildings that line a narrow street that ends in the desert<sup>171</sup>. We read about the people who live there and who cross her path (*the man with a donkey cart, the vendor*<sup>172</sup>), about the dog and the Bedouin woman. Lengthy descriptions of how the desert appears to Julie and of her long meditations when sitting on a masonry mound suggest another modernist element, the subjective perception of time. These journeys are the most important ones of all in the novel, they take up the greatest amount of space.

Another disruption of “objective representation” is the fact that her journeys cease to be linear but become cyclic, assume a ritual-like nature (only particular time of the day, she always buys fritters etc.). The desert becomes a place of spirituality for like the prophets in Judaeo-Christian tradition who came from the desert and periodically returned there to purify their hearts Julie retires to the seemingly inhospitable piece of land whenever she faces crises, when her beliefs seem to turn out false and unreliable. It is a room for self-examination, soul-searching and self-questioning where she comes to look for answers when disappointed and lost in vain attempts to understand the other<sup>173</sup>. It is here she meditates upon what her own truth is.

*Of why you live the way you do. And how that ought to be. No rules, not those of The Suburbs or even (not any more!) those no-rules of The Table – the elusive coherence is what there would be to go by – something of what is known grandly as the truth. ...Well, the individual truth. Nobody else's.*<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Gordimer 171

<sup>171</sup> Gordimer 131

<sup>172</sup> Gordimer 229

<sup>173</sup> Gordimer 230

<sup>174</sup> Gordimer 244

C. Desert as a source of revelation

But why desert? What is going on there? Self and other dichotomy depicted as a general inter-subjectivity or more specific, social, cultural and gender difference ceases to take place within human context only. The encounter with otherness is this time represented by a confrontation with a natural element. It is, too, rendered as a structural device to save the dual structure of the novel. The two environments, earlier contrasted with each other, come this time to represent one principle, the human agency. Both are the products of human activities, both represent culture and civilization, space where human beings, their actions and achievements matter and make a difference. Not in the desert. There, one is exposed to the elements, to the indifference of the environment. In the desert, one is inescapably faces the threat of nothingness (*But there is no-one. Nothing imprinted on the desert.*<sup>175</sup>), the irrelevant nature of all activities, distractions, drives.

*Go no farther with your belching cars, your bleary lights in the majesty of darkness, your street vendors and broadcast babble; go no farther in your aspirations*<sup>176</sup>.

The desert as is depicted in the text represents everything that is outside the human realm - infinity, death or ultimate immobility. Everything that is free from human element or even anything alive, free from growth and, therefore, in Gordimer's words "pure".

*...only that which is inactive can attain purity. Nullity is purity; detachment from the greedy stirring of growth. Eternity is purity; what lasts is not alive.*<sup>177</sup>

Face to face with the desert, nothing is the same, everything assumes different significance.

*"When you thirst, in the sands, water takes on a new meaning...."*<sup>178</sup>

One must pay attention to different things - to accept the empty silence, to ignore sun and heat, to be untroubled by the sparseness of everything other than space. What otherwise seems important, appears suddenly as irrelevant, vain. It makes Julie laugh at the "games"<sup>179</sup> of The Table, "English

<sup>175</sup> Gordimer 231

<sup>176</sup> Gordimer 167

<sup>177</sup> Gordimer 172

<sup>178</sup> Gordimer 168

<sup>179</sup> Gordimer 198



*charades in the desert*”<sup>180</sup> in the books she has ordered. Encounter with the desert brings reevaluation of standards. Certain things are no longer necessary, certain things cease to be real.

The novel reveals a sharp contrast between the constant, unbroken and lifeless space and a bewildered human being with a fractured consciousness, “a hurricane, every thought bending and crossing its coherence inside her”<sup>181</sup>. Yet, there are moments when the nature of the desert affects deeply Julie's sensibility and the space takes her deep within herself; “taken into it, for it has no measure of space..”<sup>182</sup> Her consciousness and the immensity of space of the desert infiltrate each other, her confusion goes away and she arrives at self-knowledge.

*The dog went silently away. She sat on until the tumult slowly cleared within her disentangled. The sands of the desert dissolve conflict; there is space, space for at least one thought to come: to arrive at.*<sup>183</sup>

It is evident that Gordimer's depiction of the vastness of the desert and its effect on the character, i.e. as a spiritually, aesthetically or emotionally uplifting experience, in some ways correspond to the theories of sublime as articulated by 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers, mainly Edmund Burke (*Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*), Immanuel Kant (and his distinction between Beautiful and Sublime in *Critique of Judgment*)<sup>184</sup>. Both of them spoke of the sublime as something incomparably and absolutely great, inspiring a sense of awe<sup>185</sup>. For our particular case (the fusion of the physical and inner), however, the ideas of Gaston Bachelard, French philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are far the most convenient. He emphasizes vastness as interplay between exterior space and interior spiritual place of the self and he goes even so far as to suggest a total breakdown in the dichotomy of interior/exterior. He writes:

*“The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself.”*<sup>186</sup>

Immensity belongs to contemplation, according to Bachelard, who names it “the intimacy of

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<sup>180</sup> Gordimer 198

<sup>181</sup> Gordimer 230

<sup>182</sup> Gordimer 172

<sup>183</sup> Gordimer 231

<sup>184</sup> Nicola Trott. “The Picturesque, the Beautiful and the Sublime” *A Companion to Romanticism*. Ed by Duncan Wu. Blackwell Publishing 1998. pg. 78

<sup>185</sup> Eva T.H. Brann. *The World of Imagination. Sum and Substance*. Rowman and Littlefield 1991. Pg 749.

<sup>186</sup> Bachelard in J.E.Malpas. *Place and Experience. A Philosophical Topography*. The Cambridge University Press 1999. pg 6

*immensity*"<sup>187</sup>. As the immense is intrinsic to our inner world in the state of reverie, it is through this particular immensity and the physical immensity of the world space that these two worlds merge. The spaces of inner and outer – of mind and world – are transformed one into the other as inner space is brought outside and outer space within.

*"When human solitude deepens, then the two immensities touch and become identical"*.<sup>188</sup>

Julie's encounter appears to be such a fusion of consciousness and physical space, a collapse of interior and exterior distinction which constitutes a revelation, a self-understanding. *"The sands of the desert (outer) dissolve (inner) conflict"*.

The immensity of the desert becomes an appropriate background, space to be filled with the limitlessness of her inner world, inner stream of consciousness, the *stream of vision*<sup>189</sup> where future reveals its sinister possibilities; the ultimate humiliation of the other, in particular.

*Her mother/Danielle introduces Ibrahim/Abdu to women, bringing him forward by the hand: my son in law, an oriental prince..in Gucci shoes, Armani pants and Ralph Lauren shirt Danielle's brought him, his beauty is an exotic dish to sample along with the pool-side lunch.*<sup>190</sup>

Humiliation, indeed, but seen and understood as such only through the other's, Julie's eyes. It is precisely that revelation with which Julie becomes "purified" and her "truth" is discovered. Seeing and feeling the immensity of her own consciousness (via immensity of the desert) she understands that immense complexity of the other is beyond her reach, like her own is for the other. The other is not to be appropriated. Not even by her.

*"But he is himself. Nobody's task."*<sup>191</sup>

#### **D. Desert as ungraspable as everything else.**

The self always strives to discover and understand otherness either for the sake of intimacy

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<sup>187</sup> Eva T.H. Brann. *The World of Imagination. Sum and Substance*. Rowman and Littlefield 1991. Pg 749.

<sup>188</sup> Bachelard in Eva T.H. Brann. *The World of Imagination. Sum and Substance*. Rowman and Littlefield 1991. Pg 749.

<sup>189</sup> Gordimer 245

<sup>190</sup> Gordimer 245

<sup>191</sup> Gordimer 245

in a love relationship, or in attempts to discover the voice of the subaltern; the social and cultural otherness. The appropriation of Abdu-Ibrahim by The Table, Julie's and Abdu-Ibrahim's mutual alienation and isolation reveal that these attempts always somehow fail and result in grave misunderstandings. The encounter with the desert as a confrontation with otherness that goes beyond anything human is by no means an exception. We understand that Julie perceives the timelessness and immobility of the desert yet are these notions actually thinkable, imaginable, and again, representable? The immensity of the desert is only a reflection of the immensity of her inner world. It's characteristics are only reflections of what already exists within herself. Even here the other is perceived through self, via the subjective space.

Any major attempt to embrace and comprehend otherness by the characters in the novel represents a failure. otherness escapes Julie, Abdu-Ibrahim, or The Table. The novel is mainly about that escape and coming to terms with it. Behind "*But he is himself.*" we hear "*Tout autre est tout autre. (Every other is completely other.)*"<sup>192</sup> as Jacques Derrida articulated the problem.

*The most difficult for everything we do say or do or cry, however, outstretched toward the other we may be, remains within us.*<sup>193</sup>

Like Julie who, at the end of the novel, must come to terms with the freedom of the other that resists appropriation so do we, the readers, must come to terms with the essential uncertainty that veils the action of the novel or the world around us. Like Julie we must come to terms with the lack of knowledge and its ultimate inaccessibility.

The experimental mode of the novel then undermines the authority of the text and precisely that contradiction/paradox emphasizes (or demonstrates?) the escape of what the novel *represents*.

While the text attempts to convey movement (rhizomatic movement) or mode of being (being as otherness/subaltern), it *represents* merely tracing (the rhizome escapes) and illusion (of otherness) yet, eventually, it reveals also its own self-awareness, acknowledgment of its failure, perhaps, for us to acknowledge our own.

<sup>192</sup> Jacques Derrida. "From Psyche". *Acts of Literature*. Routledge 1992. pg 321

<sup>193</sup> Jacques Derrida. *The Gift of Death*. University of Chicago Press 1995. pg 68

## E. Journey as enigma

Julie's final journey dissolves in immobility. Journey as a failure, journey as a pickup, journey as a readiness to embrace otherness, the final journey leads towards space which is defined by characteristics that seem to be the very contradiction of the very nature of any journey. The journeys, motions in time and space, terminate in a place which is depicted as motionless and timeless. Perhaps, it serves to allude to the great metaphor of life as a journey that is halted by death; something beyond the time-space continuum. Lifeless, timeless, eternal, irrational like the dog and the Bedouin woman encountered regularly.

*Sometime the stray dog appeared; what was it he found in the desert, as the woman's flock of goats found pasture; but this was not the place of questions to be asked of oneself or answered.*<sup>194</sup>

Here the concept of journey is transformed profoundly. From here it becomes impossible and pointless to go anywhere.

The final scene of Abdu-Ibrahim's departure is closed by a scene full of inertia, waiting of women, and silence. The whole act is summarized by a simple gesture and a phrase uttered in Arabic, contradictory and ambiguous as the novel itself.

*Khadija put an arm around her conspiratorially, smiled intimately, and held out the bunch of sweetness, smooth dark shiny dates. She spoke Arabic, the foreigner understands enough now. 'He'll come back'*  
*But perhaps a reassurance offered for herself, Khadija thinking of her man at the oil fields.*  
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In that sentence pronounced by the Arab woman hopelessness rather than hope is present (after all it is only “a reassurance”). The optimist interpretation would imply re-union, eventual understanding, love. Rather, we sense the pessimistic insight into the reality of waiting for someone who either disappears in the tumult of the “other” world or comes back to reveal the hopelessness

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<sup>194</sup> Gordimer 198

<sup>195</sup> Gordimer 268

of journeys that always lead to where they begin. The latter option would not be the first time for Abdu-Ibrahim. Journey in that case assumes cyclic character for both of the main characters. They both seem leave from and return to the same place (the village, the desert). A cycle the meaning of which we must question.

Julie remains silent, offering only “*appropriate kindly answers*”<sup>196</sup> to those who question her about her intentions or plans. She does not respond to Khadija's remark, the final sentence is confusing again related to the doubt whose perspective we are presented with. Indeed, who is it speaking?

In the end, we are leaving the text with essential uncertainty and sense of mystery. What remains is merely a small talk (the content of which we are not even given), Khadija's ambiguous remark, Julie's inaccessibility and a narrator's voice with an unclear point of view. The final perspective (of the narrator, Julie?) remains hidden. .

The journey of the text then ends with impossibility to explicate the purpose and mystery of Julie's experience. The insecurity lurking behind the orderly and apparently purposeful world of the novel takes over. What we are left with is enigma that again undermines the representational mode of the novel and possibility for knowledge of the world in general. That final dubiety and slipperiness attack us just before the signifying power of words and their materiality surrender to the emptiness of a blank page. The rest is our journey, the journey of a reader to look for a message in that enigma of what the text does not say.

One senses a kind of pessimism and skepticism behind the ending that drives the text further from order, clarity or linearity. The ultimate nature of the world in the novel at the time of its ending lacks clear structure: it is chaotic, without evident reason or purpose. With the indeterminacy of its end the novel proclaims something sinister about the recognition where the journey leads to. It leads to skepticism toward the possibility of objective representation, the limited scope of human perception or the difficulty of its communication. Paradox and lack of understanding conquer the

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<sup>196</sup> Gordimer 268

world of human relationships and dominate the situations as they emerge at the end of the narrative. Such is the reality of the world we live in according to Nietzsche. He believed these are the truths that we find in art, for in art the sinister facts about reality and beautiful illusion merge together to produce tragic reality where human beings can grasp the reality of life without being threatened by it<sup>197</sup>. These pessimistic ideas come to us in the form of literature, fiction, beautiful words that bring pleasure and comfort. Why would we want to read/set on a journey if it were entirely without pleasure? Literature is, indeed, “*another country without fires, where fever lurks under leaves*”. Fires would represent the danger of destruction and death but where beauty and knowledge reside along each other what we perceive is merely fever bringing tragic consciousness that ceases to be destructive. That is where the journey leads to.

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<sup>197</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Transl. By Douglas Smith. Oxford University Press 2000. pg 46 - “*Here at this point of extreme danger for the will, art draws near as the enchantress who comes to rescue and heal; only she can reshape that disgust at the thought of the horrific or absurd aspects of life into notions with which it is possible to live..*”

## Résumé/Summary

Dílo Nadine Gordimerové je charakteristické komplexností a zaměřením se na tuto jeho vlastnost začíná má diplomová práce. Autorčiny romány zobrazují komplikovanost a rozporuplnost intimního světa lidských vztahů, milostných, rodinných či přátelských a jejich složitý poměr vůči světu veřejnému, politickému. To, co způsobuje onu složitost v rámci mezilidských vztahů, je především neschopnost komunikace s druhým, který je nějak jiný – buďto barvou své kůže, společenským postavením nebo kulturní odlišností. Sama Gordimerová prožitek této odlišnosti dobře zná. Jako bílá intelektuálka-spisovatelka angažující se v boji za dodržování základních lidských práv, jež dlouhá léta žila v rasově rozdělené společnosti Jižní Afriky, se nemohla v pravém smyslu ztotožnit ani s jednou stranou konfliktu. Hodnoty vládnoucí menšiny pro ni byly neakceptovatelné, avšak součástí potlačované většiny se, pro své privilegované postavení, nikdy nemohla stát.

Toto téma se ve velké míře zobrazuje v konfliktech a situacích, v kterých se ocitají postavy jejích románů. Nejinak tomu je i v knize, jež je předmětem této práce. Hlavním tématem románu The Pickup (v českém překladu Poutníci) je odlišnost, jinakost a její přivlastňování subjektem, která nás provází celým příběhem jak tematicky tak formálně. Jde tu o jinakost v intimním vztahu dvou lidí, o nemožnost překlenutí kulturních rozdílů či o přírodním elementu, který splývá s vnitřním světem postav.

Ústřední metaforou se stává cesta, kolem níž je jak román tak vlastní text diplomové práce uspořádán a která nás provádí rozličnými tématy, jež se v románu objevují. Cesta a pohyb je také první zastávkou ve snaze hlouběji prozkoumat vztah mezi formou a problematikou, o níž román pojednává.

Téma cesty se objevuje už v úvodní básni, která slouží jako motto celého textu. Její rozbor směřuje k zamyšlení se nad vztahem reality a literatury, jelikož právě ona nás nutí opustit svět materiální a ponořit se do světa imaginárního. Fiktivní svět básně je také podnětem k cestě hlavní

postavy Julie, cestě nikoliv čtenářské nýbrž cestě ve fyzickém slova smyslu.

Také náš román začíná cestou, tedy spíše jejím koncem. Úvodní cesta Julie za přáteli končí znenadání automobilovou nehodou, která je také příčinou seznámení s automechanikem Abduem, ilegálním imigrantem, s nímž, snad z nudy, snad ze zvědavosti, naváže nejdříve přátelství a později i milostný poměr. Povaha jejich vztahu je svým způsobem popsána názvem románu. “The Pickup” je derivát frázového slovesa (to pick up) vyznačující se sémantickou ambivalencí. Implikuje totiž jak činitelskou, tak trpitelskou roli. Stejná ambivalence se pak objevuje ve vztahu dvou hlavních postav. Nikdy přesně nevíme, kdo z nich je v rámci tohoto vztahu dominantní, tj. kdo tím druhým manipuluje a kdo je naopak manipulován.

Toto sloveso/podstatné jméno v sobě nese také určitou náhodnost, libovolnost, lehkomyšlnost, která je vlastní Julii a taktéž způsobu, jakým navazuje vztahy. Ať už ten k Abduovi, k rodičům, nebo přátelství s umělci, intelektuály a volnomyšlenkáři, s nimiž se schází v uvolněném a bohémském prostředí kavárny El-Ey. Bytí s druhými lidmi postrádá jakoukoliv intimitu a vzájemnou důvěru na jedné straně a zodpovědnost či povinnost na straně druhé. To samozřejmě ovlivňuje i pohyb postav, jejich neukotvení, to, že nedokáží zapustit kořeny ve svém prostředí, nejsou nikde doma. Deleuzova a Guattariho metafora rizomu výstižně popisuje pohyb a vzájemné setkávání postav, tj. jak se kumulují a zase rozprchávají, vytvářejí nezávazná společenství, která zase opouštějí, aby náhodně vytvářely další. Jejich pohyb není lineární, nikde nezačíná ani nekončí (román začíná v půlce cesty a končí počátkem jiné). Zdá se však, že rizomatický pohyb neproniká do struktury textu, která je selektivní (ústřední linie příběhu) a hierarchicky uspořádaná (hlavní postavy, vedlejší postavy). Text má počátek a konec a jeho děj je převážně logický, lineární. Jako “tracing” redukuje rizomatický pohyb, který mu pak uniká.

Bytí jako vykořeněnost a dynamický pohyb vytváří identitu, která je nestálá a která se vztahuje k druhému, jinému, než aby byla určena stejností či podobností. Možná proto Julii cosi tak silně připoutává k novému partnerovi, tolik od ní odlišného – kulturou, sociálním postavením, jazykem. Možná díky tolika rozdílům je jejich vztah postaven na zásadních nedorozuměních, které



se týkají toho, kým jsou, za koho se považují, co od druhého a sami od sebe očekávají. Zjišťujeme, že si o druhém vytváří více méně statický obraz, který se skutečnou povahou druhého nemá vůbec nic společného. Tomuto obrazu podřizují své chování a zároveň sami cítí, jak si je druhý znásilňuje stejným způsobem, čímž se mezi nimi vytváří bariéra, kterou je schopna překonat pouze tělesná vášeň. Ta má svá vlastní pravidla a zákony.

Nedostupnost druhého se pak promítá i do formy románu. O postavách a jejich skutečných motivech máme pouze kusé informace a nikdy přesně nerozumíme příčinám jejich rozhodnutí. Pouze zřídka se vyprávění posune z 3. formy do první osoby, a my tak pronikáme do vnitřního světa postav, abychom poodhalili jejich záměry, pochopili vzájemné omyly a vlastní povahu nedorozumění.

Sebepoznání postav a jejich vzájemné vnímání souvisí s tím, že se román odehrává na dvou místech, kosmopolitním Johannesburgu a zapomenuté nepojmenované vesničce v poušti, kam obě postavy přibližně v půlce románu putují. Julie i Abdu-Ibráhím se tak v románu pohybují jak na domovské půdě, tak v exilu. Tato dichotomie nám umožňuje srovnávat jejich reakce a pochopit zřejmě to jediné, co kromě vzájemné fyzické touhy oba sdílí. Obě postavy totiž pocítují jakousi nechuť k domácímu prostředí, k němuž je nic nepoutá, a proto nemají zábrany odejít a žít jinde. V cizím prostředí se rozhodujícím způsobem proměňují (Ibráhím se dokonce stává Abduem), jejich identita se stává identitou cizince, vždy svým způsobem vzdáleného ostatním. V postavě Abdu-Ibráhíma se musíme ptát, zda není vzdálený i samotné autorce.

Pokrytectví Juliiných přátel u kavárenského Stolu, kteří se jeví jako zdánlivě tolerantní a otevření, je pouhá hra. Při podrobnějším zkoumání jejich debat zjišťujeme, že Abdu-Ibráhím v nich nedostává žádný prostor, ačkoliv je hlavním tématem hovoru. Nikdo ho ve skutečnosti neposlouchá, nikdo se vlastně nezajímá o to, co říká, přestože se debaty konají v “jeho zájmu”. Abdu-Ibráhímovi tak u Stolu schází hlas a zůstává němý. V jeho rámci se stává “subalterním” subjektem, který nemá možnost se reprezentovat. Pokud srovnáme roli Stolu s rolí autorky či s naší čtenářskou rolí, musíme si položit zásadní otázku, zda s Abdu-Ibráhímem nezacházíme podobným způsobem.

Abdu-Ibrahím, anonymní ilegální immigrant, je skutečně němý, neboť postrádá jakoukoliv výpovědní hodnotu o realitě ilegálního imigranta. Je pouhou námi a autorkou vytvořenou iluzí a tudíž nerepresentovatelný.

Právě reprezentace je v románu klíčovým problémem. Přestože si autorka Abdu-Ibrahíma “přivlastňuje” (např. o něm hovoří v první osobě), děje se tak způsobem, jež samotný fakt reprezentace pomocí proudu vědomí podrývá. Román se vlastně pohybuje někde na půli cesty mezi realismem a experimentem. Lineární příběh, snaha o zachycení společenského klimatu, autoritativní er-forma je narušována pouze obtížně rozpoznatelným posuny mezi postavami jako reflektory situací, subjektivním vnímáním času či, již zmíněnými, proudy vědomí. Možnost objektivní reprezentace je tím relativizována a vzniká rozpor, paradox (autorka cosi “činí”, ale sama to, co činí, zpochybňuje). Co to znamená pro samotné přivlastnění Abdu-Ibrahíma?

Text je sebereflexivní, je si vědom svého selhání. Hlavním tématem se tak stává tento neúspěch a smíření se s ním. Julie na poušti poznává a akceptuje fakt, že Abdu-Ibrahím ji uniká. My jako čtenáři se musíme smířit s tím, že postavám vlastně nerozumíme. I sám text si je vědom toho, že druhého je nemožné znát, tj. objektivně reprezentovat, čímž popírá sám sebe.

Konec románu je posunem k určité vágnosti. Nevíme, co se vlastně děje, nevíme, kdo mluví a co vlastně říká. Cesta končí v poušti, nehybnosti, bezčasí a nekonečnosti, kterou nelze vyjádřit ani chápat, je to pouhý prostor vyplněný projekcemi lidské mysli. Naše já dominuje všemu, co vnímáme, a tomuto stavu věcí nelze uniknout.

Práce končí úvahou, jak je možné, že je v nás čtenářská touha, odvaha vydávat se na cestu a přijímat tyto skutečnosti. Je to iluzorní krása přítomná v umění, potěšení a útěcha, kterou nám umění skýtá. Krása zahalující pravdu o pochmurnosti podstaty naší existence nám umožňuje získat tragické vědomí a přijmout pravdu, aniž by nás ohrožovala.

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